

# Teaching Sikh Heritage to the Youth

*Lessons Learnt*

(Vol. II)



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Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh



**Singh Brothers**  
**Amritsar**

# Teaching Sikh Heritage to the Youth : Lessons Learnt

Vol. II

*by*

DR. GURBAKHSI SINGH

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## Acknowledgements

During the fourth centennial of the compilation of *gurbani* by Guru Arjun Dev, I was invited to Delhi in May 2004. In my lectures I mentioned some of the lessons, I had learnt while discoursing on the message of *gurbani* for the modern world at Sikh youth camps in North America. The importance of a firm belief in God and the obeying of the spiritual message of *dhur ki bani* were the themes of my talks.

My friends in Delhi found my talks to the *sangat* and my dialogue in the schools with the youth very useful. They made me agree to write the lessons learnt as Vol II of the already published book, *Teaching Sikh Heritage to the Youth – Lessons Learnt*.

This assignment became a top priority with me. In the end of May, after my lectures in Delhi, I reached Vancouver, Canada. Sardar Kamalbir Singh (Randhawa), formerly my student at the Khalsa School, Vancouver, kindly volunteered to do the typing job. Some earlier episodes, which could not be included in Vol I, also appear in this Volume.

Thanks are hereby expressed to all friends who suggested changes in the draft of this Volume. I must specifically recognise the contributions made by Sardar Gurmit Singh of Australia, who suggested some critical changes to use appropriate Sikh terms. Professor Surinderjit Singh, Village Gill, Ludhiana, kindly went through the manuscript and suggested improvements. A collegiate, Tejdev Singh of Virginia, USA did a valuable editing job for making it readable by the modern youth. Dr. Kharak Singh, editor, *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, made many improvements in the write-up before it was submitted

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July, 2005

**Gurbakhsh Singh (Dr.)**



## Section A

The source of all religions is God. A devotee needs an unshakable faith in Him to be a religious person. If there is even an iota of doubt about God, faith in Him has little value.

During the Sikh youth camps the students, who were not convinced about the existence of God, asked many questions regarding the concept of God. The discussions held at different camps during 1985-1995 were summarized in two articles "Who is God ?" and "Was God Invented or Discovered ?" A young Sikh scholar, Ishwinder Singh, Chandigarh wrote the article "Is there God ?" It is based on the material he found from the internet. Another article, "Guru Granth Sahib, A Universal Scripture for World Peace" written for the conference on **Guru Granth Sahib and World Peace** in 2003 at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar has also been included. This article meets the need of a seeker who wants to practise faith for peace.

These articles, earlier published in the *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Chandigarh, have been included in this section. It is hoped that these different approaches will lead to a better understanding of the Supreme Reality in which all major religions believe.



# 1

## Who is God ?

Today, people are still searching for a satisfactory answer to the age-old question, "What, or Who, is God ?" All are anxious to know whether He/She is there or not.

To understand the answer, first we have to define God as precisely as we can. The definitions of God as given by different religions are not verifiable by the standard scientific methods. This has made some people to disbelieve in the existence of God. The fact is that God defies any definition. It is a word with most complex meanings and connotations.

The difficulty arises, because God is a super cosmic Spiritual Being, but we have to describe Him in the terminology used in the material world. It is like measuring the value of gold in terms of currency bills that are just pieces of paper and have no intrinsic value. The language of God is love, a language understood by the heart and not expressible in words even by the thousands of languages we humans use to communicate with each other. Because of this, we are not able to *speak* the language of love, but all of us can *experience* it, feel it, and enjoy it. For explaining it, analogy of a dumb person tasting honey is often mentioned in religious texts; he enjoys the taste but cannot describe it. This faculty of experiencing the love of the Lord, provided to us by Him, opens the door to His Court and helps us to communicate with Him.

According to dictionary, God is the Creator and the ruler of the universe; He is eternal and infinite, omnipotent and omniscient; He is Almighty, Supreme Being, and The Reality.

The definitions given by different faiths do not disagree with any of the above descriptions of God. Other qualities of God generally accepted by different faiths are that He is omnipresent, incomprehensible, immanent, transcendent etc. Further, God has been described to be gracious, kind and caring for the whole creation. Some people also believe that God created eternal Heaven for the comfort of the faithful persons after their death; they also believe in Hell where all non-believers, who ignore His commandments, will suffer forever.

All these are mere 'words' explaining God but how to experience Him and enjoy His blessings is the purpose of this presentation. A brief historical review of the revelation of God is necessary for us to move on this path.

## **Revelation**

The first need of a human being on this earth is not God but food for his life and favorable environment for his physical comfort. This, of course, depends upon weather, which is controlled by the sun, rain, winds etc. The people, therefore, believed the weather elements to be gods and started their worship. In due course of time, they observed that, unlike animals, human beings have been provided with unique faculties. They command a special status among all living beings, large or small. Hence, they believed that their life must have some higher mission other than just completing their biological cycle like animals, that is, to eat, grow, reproduce, get old, and die.

At some stage of this development, persons of supreme intelligence, specially gifted by God, were born at different times and in different regions of the world. Some of those geniuses made worldly inventions and thus contributed to the physical comfort and knowledge of humankind; they were known as scientists. Those, who revealed and described God, the Creator, were called Prophets, Saviors. Because of their virtues as well as their competence to perform supernatural acts, they were regarded as unique humans. They provided spiritual guidance to humanity and

were considered as God-incarnate, God's son, God's messenger, God-blessed, seekers gifted with Godly intelligence, guide to God etc. Each prophet gave a spiritual message and told people the mission of human life, which is to live in the love of the Lord.

They delivered their spiritual messages in different regions of the world during different periods of history, and hence in different languages. They all revealed that there is one Supreme Authority, the Creator; of course, they chose a different name for Him according to the local language. We now address Him with the popular name God. Different methods of worship preached for understanding and experiencing Him were given different names, commonly known as religions.

## **Misunderstanding God**

Different names of the Supreme Reality used by people of different faiths, however, were considered to be different Gods, and they were assumed to be mutually callous and repulsive. This assumption is totally wrong and baseless because of the very definition of God explained above and accepted by all religions. However, the mutual repulsion among the followers of different faiths continues to persist. As a result, people were split into mutually hating religions even when all believed in the *same* Reality. It is actually to satisfy their own ego that people are fighting to put their own *labels* (the name of God in their language and rituals of their faith) on the bottles of *water* (God's virtues), which have been filled from the *same Fountain* (God, The Supreme Reality). Remember ! Our need is *water* and *not the label*. Why bother about the label, value the water which we need to satisfy our thirst.

In fact religions, instead of dividing people, should have united all tribes, races and nations into one great brotherhood of humanity; of course, all having faith in God with multiple names. We should have accepted all these names of the Father-Almighty, the way a biological father is addressed as dad, daddy, papa, padre, and other innumerable names in thousands of languages of the world.

Because of their ignorance, believers of one faith consider only 'their' God to be the 'true and genuine' God. Every 'other' God, which actually is 'another' Name for Him, is declared to be 'false and fake'. The misplaced urge to prove the genuineness and superiority of their God and their faith caused the followers of the ruling faith to commit inhuman torture (and sadly they are inflicting it even today) and mass killings of believers of other faiths. No reference to such horrible crimes is needed; it is a well-known record of history, a dark spot on the tradition of religions. Politically strong religions have attempted to subdue and have even resorted to the genocide of the people of other faiths by labeling them as 'non-believers'. This is done considering it a service to their faith, but it is rated as a heinous criminal act in the court of God whom they want to please.

## **Discovering the one Universal God**

A day was destined to come when people will experience Truth by accepting *one and the same God* with as many names as they may love to give Him. God, as it was stated earlier, is 'love' and one can love Him by single or multiple names or even without assigning Him any name. The analogy of a child loving his mother explains it well.

The child is devoted heart and soul to his mother without using or even knowing her name. The child believes that she, irrespective of her name, is the source of love, comfort and everything else, he needs for his happiness. A child may call her mom, mama, mother and with many other names in different languages of the world. Children in the world address their mothers by countless names, but in the heart of every child, one thing remains the same for the mother—the love and faith in her affection and protection.

Every one of us has experienced the love of the mother and we can learn a lesson from it, "*Love the Lord, the Father-Mother of whole humanity, the way we love our dad and mom. All people are His/Her children, love them as your brothers and sisters.*" If

we practice this belief, there will be peace all over the earth, and this very world will become the real Heaven, we are desirous of getting into after death.

This revelation in the East was received by Nanak of Punjab and many other seekers. The message revealed independently to each one of them was the same, "Do not divide people into Hindus and Muslims,<sup>1</sup> low caste and high caste. All the people are the children of the same Father; both Allah and Ram are His names. No prophet (or community) can lay his or her sole claim on Him. Anybody who loves Him can realize Him."

To share this revelation, the message from the Almighty, Nanak founded the institutions of *sangat* and *pangat*. *Sangat* is a congregation of people, whatever their faith, who sit together as equals and jointly sing praises of the Lord in any language they can understand and speak. All people including Muslims, Hindus, low castes and untouchables (mistakenly so labeled by the ego-filled high castes), men and women, educated and illiterate, scholars and common people etc., all sit together as equals to remember His virtues and pray to Him. *Sangat* adopted all names of God then prevalent in Panjab, for example, Allah (a Muslim name for the Lord), Ram and Krishan (used by Hindus), Niranjan (loved by Yogis) and many other names. They worshipped God by reflecting on His blessings for the whole humanity. When they partake of food together as equals, and without any discrimination among them, the gathering is named *pangat*.

The fifth Nanak in 1604 C.E. compiled the hymns revealed to his predecessors and other holy people devoted to God. This compilation, the 'sacred scripture', contains the experiences of God-realization by about two dozen spiritual seekers born as Hindus, Muslims, low castes, and untouchables. They were born at different times and in different regions of the subcontinent, now divided into India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

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1. These two names actually refer to all faiths. Hinduism and Islam were the two major faiths then practiced in India; they addressed the Lord as Ram and Allah respectively. However, they nursed (unfortunately they do it even now) a very strong feeling of hatred against each other.

## Devotees Realize God<sup>2</sup>

As mentioned above, many devotees independently found that all people are created and loved by the *same one Lord*. He may be addressed by any name or no name. Here below is the English version of the excerpts taken from some of their hymns (references to the originals in the 'sacred scripture', Guru Granth Sahib, are given for the interested scholars). They all state, of course in different words of their own, the same truth that the 'glow' of God is equally reflected in all humankind. The Lord prevails everywhere; there is none other except Him. Therefore, to realize Him and enjoy His blessings, the hymns advise us that we should treat and love all people, irrespective of their caste, creed, or color, as members of one big family of human beings.

**Nanak**, 1469 - 1539 C.E., the founder of the Sikh faith; born to Hindu parents at Nankana, in Panjab, Pakistan; traveled widely and visited all the major centers of religions in Asia, including Hardwar, Varanasi, Gaya, Ujjain, etc., in India. He visited Sri Lanka to talk to the Buddhists; To share his revelations with the Muslim theologians, he went to Mecca and Baghdad in the Middle East; he also ascended the Himalayas to have dialogue with *sidhs* and yogis :

We all are equal children of the same One Father. (p. 611)<sup>3</sup>

His Spirit is reflected in everyone,  
all 'glow' only with His light. (p. 13)

**Kabir**, 1398-1518 C.E., a low caste weaver, born to a Hindu mother, raised by a Muslim couple; lived in Varanasi (earlier name Benaras), a Hindu sacred city in north India :

The whole universe sprang from One Divine light. Therefore,  
no one can be labeled as good or bad, high or low. All my  
doubts are gone and I find Him pervading everywhere  
through the whole universe. (p. 1349)

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2. Based on a paper, "Path for Peace", read by Sant (Prof) Teja Singh of Mastuana, Panjab during a peace conference held in Tokyo, Japan, in 1956.

3. Guru Granth Sahib.



**Nam Dev**, born 1271 C.E., a low caste calico-printer of Maharashtra (Southwest, India) not permitted to enter a Hindu temple, through devotion realized Him :

None else but the Lord speaks in all the living beings,  
whether they trail on the ground, walk on their legs, or fly  
in the air. (p. 988)

**Farid**, 1173-1266 C.E., a famous Muslim Pir (holy person) highly respected by the masses and even by the rulers of India; lived in southwest Panjab (Pakistan) :

Do not be rude to any person, the same Divine Master dwells  
in the heart of every human being. If you want to realize  
the Lord, do not hurt the feelings of anyone. (p. 1384)

**Bhikhan**, a Sufi fakir, lived during 16th century in Lucknow, northern India :

The Lord blessed me with the priceless jewel, the Divine Naam  
(virtues). One can enjoy it, but like a dumb person, cannot  
describe it. I observe Him revealing Himself everywhere in  
the whole universe. (p. 659)

**Ravi Dass**, a shoemaker, considered an untouchable, contemporary of Bhagat Kabir, lived in the holy city of Varanasi, Brahmins were highly jealous of him :

All thoughts of thine and mine, second or third (other than One  
Creator), have vanished. I observe only Him everywhere.  
(p. 345)

**Peepa**, ruler of a small kingdom in central India, lived during 15th century :

Instead of involving yourself in ritual worship, seek the Lord  
within yourself. The same Lord, Who is in the whole  
universe, dwells in every heart. Those who search (love)  
Him, realize Him. (p. 695)

**Rama Nand**, a great Vaishnav Brahmin, famous for his teachings; Kabir and some other spiritual persons were his disciples :

O Lord ! You are all pervading. You are a living Reality in  
every human being. You have made me realize the Divine  
Master in my own heart. (p. 1195)

## God Described

The analogy of gravity (an inbuilt, natural force of the earth, sun, and other cosmic bodies) may help us to describe God. Force of gravity exists everywhere in all countries and it effects all living and nonliving things all the time. We experience gravity everywhere but we cannot say, "Look ! This is gravity." We cannot limit it to a particular place because it is an all-pervading force having no form or shape. Obviously, it cannot be heard or observed as something physical. God, like the force of gravity, is here, there and everywhere; He is not limited to any particular definable form anywhere to be visible to our human eyes or other physical senses. Like the force of gravity, His influence works everywhere and all the time. He is 'love' which we can 'know' only with our mind and not by any other faculty of our body.

Gravity existed and influenced us even before it was discovered by Newton, a scientist, and a person of unusual intelligence. God existed even before He-She was revealed to gifted devotees. A few of the devotees, the spiritual scientists, who recently confirmed His existence and His love for us, have been mentioned above. To understand Him, one has to love Him and drench himself in His virtues.

Further, we know that the sun and moon shine equally for all people. No individual, nation, race, or faith can claim a sole right to them. Similarly, God loves all people and no one can claim a franchise on Him or His love. In nature, we enjoy flowers of multiple colors and of innumerable shapes and sizes. Similarly, we should love and enjoy the 'garden', called humanity, which is full of different colors, cultures, and languages; they all are managed by God, the 'Gardener'.

Hating anyone because of his/her faith, race, color, caste, nationality, status, etc., displeases our common Father, God. Forcing your way of worship (religion) on the weak is a great sin. Therefore, those who tease, torture, or kill people because of these differences, will ever suffer the worst Hell. Those who help the weak and needy enjoy the peace and pleasure of Heaven here and

hereafter. That is why Guru Nanak advised people to pray everyday, "O Virtuous God ! Bless the whole humanity as You will."

Finally, a rose by any other name is a rose and smells the same. God is God by any other name or by no name and He loves whole humanity. Let people enjoy His love and blessings. We know the taste of an eatable only when we eat it, not when we just see it or when we know its name. We have not just to know the virtues of God but live accordingly, that is, wishing well for the whole humanity and thinking ill of no person. Not only we have to talk, discuss, and believe in this path, but we have also to follow this path to reach the House of God. Nobody on your behalf can do the 'walking' on this path; you have to do it yourself to realize Him prevailing everywhere. May God bless us all and remove hatred of any kind from our minds.

## Was God Invented or Discovered ?

The two institutions of science and religion have played a major role in directing the thinking and life of human beings. As the two have different approaches to human knowledge, they often clash with each other. At first, religion ruled the thinking of man. As science advanced, its achievements, particularly in the field of creation, evolution and cosmology, shook the very roots of many religious beliefs. Even the faith in God was challenged.

Most religions hold that God has no beginning; He is the ever-existing Lord. He made all the creation we know, and the one we may know in future. Some people, on the other hand, argue that God does not really exist, and has only been invented by shrewd persons to serve their selfish interests. There is a third view as well; it suggests that the institution of God is essential; if we cannot prove Him that He does exist, it is necessary to invent (assume, create) one. Otherwise, our social structure will crumble and animal culture will prevail because only the belief in God, as Father of the entire humanity, can provide us the logical basis for morality, ethics, equality of humanity; these virtues are essential for maintaining peace in the world.

Modern youth, exposed to science, nurture doubts regarding the existence of God and question the religious practices of different faiths. I wish to share one such experience with the readers about what the youth initially believed, and how their views changed. In a Sikh youth camp held at Duncan, Vancouver Island, B.C., Canada for teaching principles of the Sikh faith, a student asked me, *"Why do we have to believe in God and why*

*are we required to follow rituals of the faith ? One should be free to do what one likes or what makes one happy."*

I was caught unaware. I did not expect such a question from the teenage son of the parents very much committed to the Sikh faith. After some thought, a simple practical method to answer the question occurred to me. There were two burly students also attending the camp. I asked them, "Would you like to have his (the boy's) T-shirt (the boy was wearing probably the best T-shirt in the group) ?" Quick came the reply, "Yes, certainly."

I continued, "OK. Then go ahead and help yourself." This startled the boy, and he exclaimed, "No ! No ! This is my shirt." I repeated my suggestion to the students, "Do not listen to him. You like his shirt, you may take it." The boy objected even more vehemently, "This is unfair, wrong. Why should they take my shirt ?" It was time for me to remind him of his statement, "Did you not say that one should do what one likes ? They like to have your shirt."

Our debate led us to the conclusion, "One should not take what belongs to the others." I asked the boy to write it on the board.

That day we swapped our roles. I acted as a learner and started asking questions, while the trainees responded. We ended up writing many more sentences on the board. For example: Do not tell lies to fool others; do not bully or torture the weak and helpless; help the needy; speak the truth, etc.

As a teacher of the group, I concluded, "Well friends ! What you have decided means that we should be good to each other and behave as members of one big family. In other words, you agree that to create a peaceful and happy society, we should behave as if all humans are children of the same father. From this we can conclude that, even if God were not there, assuming One, Father of whole humanity, would help us to maintain peace and goodwill in the world."

Finding the students attentive, I continued, "Dear friends, let me assure you that we do not have to assume God. He is there and we have a scientific proof of His existence." My response

awakened the boys to challenge my statement. The boys immediately questioned, “Agreed, we can assume Him but how can you give a scientific proof when everyone says that God is beyond the field of science ?”

I answered, “As students of science, you accept that new findings become a fact if more than three or four scientists independently obtain the same results. More than half a dozen spiritual scientists (prophets), independently of one another and living in different parts of the world practising very different cultures, have reported that there is One Almighty Lord who created the world. They, however, gave different names such as Allah, Ram, Parbrahm, Yahweh, Guru, etc., to Him according to the language and culture of the people among whom they were born. Why not accept their independent findings, their mystic and intuitive experiences, as a scientific fact ?

“According to your arguments, because we cannot observe Him and feel or locate Him, there is no God. Dear youth ! There are many other facts, which we accept without being able to verify them by our own senses. For many such physical facts, we have to believe our physical scientists and geographers.

“None of you have seen the North Pole but you believe it to be extremely cold and having six-month’s day and six-month’s night, something very unusual, may be un-believable to a layman. Newton told people that there is a force in our dead earth, which attracts everything towards itself. We call it gravity and you all know about it, but we cannot verify it by our physical senses (eye, ear, touch etc.). I failed to explain gravity to an illiterate 70-year-old man (in 1944 I was a school student; he was like a grandfather to me) who had an unshakable faith in God. I was taught about gravity in the school. When I told him that whatever we throw up comes down because the earth attracts it, he laughed at my ‘foolishness’ and advised me :

Do not tell it to anyone else, they will call you an idiot. Tell me where else it can go if not fall back on the earth ? Even the birds, which can fly, come back to the earth...

“How can you convince such a person that there is a power (gravity) which exists in the earth ? It has no shape, form, or color, it does not grow old or get sick, and it was never born and it will never die ? The old man could not imagine the existence of such a thing (power, force). However, you all know it and understand it. All these characteristics belong to God as well. Yet you believe in gravity but find it impossible to believe in Him.

“Let us accept the word of the spiritual scientists that there is a Spiritual Force which Generates, Operates and Destroys (in short, GOD) the creation. Believing in Him is essential to maintain social, moral, and ethical discipline of our society. We should accept Him even if we cannot observe Him or describe Him to a layperson in words as in the case of gravity.

“Another such concept, which you cannot explain to a layman, is already being used by you in your mathematics class. We name this number ‘infinity’. We have only a symbol for it because we cannot write it in the digit form. This number is bigger than the biggest number we can know. This concept is not possible to be understood by a young student. Without this number, we cannot work out many mathematical equations. For example, ‘one’ or any other positive real number divided by zero is equal to infinity. Similarly, not a symbol but a name, God, has been assigned to that Power, Functional, Authority, which cannot be described by us.

“There are also other facts of science which we cannot perceive through physical senses. Have anyone of you seen a gene or an electron ? How can you explain to a layman that the immense variety of grains, fruits, vegetables, trees, and other vegetation are all produced by soil, water, air, and sunlight ? You know that the energy of the sun helps water and carbon dioxide to chemically react and synthesize simple carbohydrates (sugars). From sugars, other more complex organic compounds are built. You believe in those chemical reactions taking place all the time, even when you cannot see them by your own eyes.

“Please believe me, we are laymen in the spiritual field. We should, therefore, accept the findings of the spiritual scientists.

There have been many holy people who experienced mystic communication with God. About two dozen of them have shared their experience with us through their hymns that form a part of Guru Granth Sahib and which we sing in gurdwaras everyday (see episode #1).

“About the existence of God, let us agree to assume that He is there. I can assure you that as your experience grows, you will find more and more evidence to confirm this assumption. In the pursuit of science also, we assume a hypothesis to be confirmed with subsequent observations.”

Perfect calm and seriousness in the class, attentively listening faces and no more questions, assured me that the youth felt convinced. They agreed that even though they cannot verify by themselves the existence of God, it is all right to believe in Him and benefit from the belief of oneness of humanity. It will help people to live in peace and happiness like a vast family of the Almighty Father.



## Does God Exist ?<sup>1</sup>

“Let me explain the problem science has with God.” The atheist professor of philosophy pauses before his class, and then asks one of his new students to stand.

“You’re a God-believer, aren’t you, son ?”

“Yes, sir”, the student says.

“So, you believe in God ?”

“Absolutely.”

“Is God compassionate and benevolent ?”

“Sure ! God’s benevolent.”

“Is God all-powerful ? Can God do anything ?”

“Yes.”

The professor grins knowingly. He considers for a moment. “Here’s one for you. Let us say there is a sick person over here and you can cure him. You can do it. Would you help him ? Would you try ?”

“Yes, sir, I would.”

“You would help a sick and maimed person if you could. Most of us would if we could. But God doesn’t.”

The student does not answer, so the professor continues, “He doesn’t, does He ? My brother was a God-believer who died of cancer, even though he prayed to the Almighty to heal him. How is this God benevolent ? Hmmm ? Can you answer that one ?” The student remains silent. “No, you can’t, can you ?” the professor

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1. The matter for this article is distributed widely, in a variety of forms, across the Internet. It was taken from the Internet by Sardar Ishwinder Singh to write the article, “Is There God ?” for *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Chandigarh (vol II).

says. He takes a sip of water from a glass on his desk to give the student time to relax.

“Let’s start again, young fella. Is God benevolent?”

“Err... Yes,” the student says.

“Tell me, son. Is there pain and suffering in this world?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Suffering’s everywhere, isn’t it? And God did make everything, correct?”

“Yes.”

“So who created suffering?”

Again, the student has no answer.

“Is there sickness? Immorality? Hatred? Ugliness? All these terrible things, do they exist in this world?”

The student squirms on his feet. “Yes.”

“So who created them?”

The student does not answer again, so the professor repeats his question. “Who created them?” There is still no answer. Suddenly the lecturer breaks away to pace in front of the classroom. The class is mesmerized. “Tell me,” he continues. “Do you believe in God, son?”

The student’s voice betrays him and cracks. “Yes, professor. I do.”

The old man stops pacing. “Science says you have five senses you use to identify and observe the world around you. Have you ever seen God?”

“No, sir. I’ve never seen Him.”

“Then tell us if you’ve ever heard your God?”

“No, sir. I have not.”

“Have you ever felt your God, tasted your God, or smelt your God? Have you ever had any sensory perception of God?”

“No, sir, I’m afraid, I haven’t.”

“Yet you still believe in Him?” thunders the professor.

“Yes.”

“According to the rules of empirical, testable, demonstrable protocol, science says your God doesn’t exist. What do you say to that, son?”

"Nothing," the student replies. "I only have my faith."

"Yes, faith," the professor repeats. "And that is the problem science has with God. There is no evidence, only faith."

The student stands quietly for a moment, before asking a question of his own. "Professor, is there such a thing as heat?"

"Yes," the professor replies. "There's heat."

"And is there such a thing as cold?"

"Yes, son, there's cold too."

"No, sir, there isn't."

The professor turns to face the student, obviously interested. The room suddenly becomes very quiet. The student begins to explain. "You can have lots of heat, conductive, convective or radiative heat, a little heat, or no heat, but we don't have anything called 'cold'. We can hit 458 degrees below zero, which is no heat, but we cannot go any further after that. There is no such thing as cold; otherwise we would be able to go colder than minus 458 degrees. You see, sir, cold is only a word we use to describe the absence of heat. We cannot measure cold. Heat we can measure in thermal units because heat is energy. Cold is not the *opposite* of heat, sir, just the *absence* of it."

Silence across the room! A pen drops somewhere in the classroom, sounding like a hammer. "What about darkness, professor. Is there such a thing as darkness?"

"Yes," the professor replies without hesitation. "What is night if it isn't darkness?"

"You're wrong again, sir. Darkness is not *something*; it is the *absence of something*. You can have ultraviolet, infrared or visible light. However, if you have no light of any kind, you have nothing and it is called absolute darkness, isn't it? That is the meaning we use to define the word. In reality, darkness is not there. If it were, you would be able to make darkness darker, wouldn't you?"

The professor begins to smile at the student in front of him. "This will be a good semester. So what point are you making, young man?"

“Yes, professor. My point is, your philosophical premise is flawed to start with, and so your conclusion must also be flawed.”

The professor’s face cannot hide his surprise this time. “Flawed ? Can you explain how ?”

“You are working on the premise of duality,” the student explains. “You argue that there is life and then there’s death; a good God and a bad God. You are viewing the concept of God as something finite, something we can measure. Sir, science can’t even explain a ‘thought’. Science uses electricity and magnetism but has never seen, much less fully understood, either one. To view death as the opposite of life is to be ignorant of the fact that death cannot exist as a substantive thing. Death is not the opposite of life, just the absence of it. Now tell me, professor. Do you teach your students that they evolved from a monkey ?”

“If you are referring to the natural evolutionary process, young man, yes, of course, I do.”

“Have you ever observed evolution with your own eyes, sir ?”

The professor begins to shake his head, still smiling, as he realizes where the argument is going. “A very good semester indeed !”

“Since no one has ever observed the process of evolution at work and cannot even prove that this process is an ongoing endeavor, are you not teaching your opinion, sir ? Are you now not a scientist, but a preacher ?”

The class is in uproar. The student remains silent until the commotion has subsided.

“To continue the point you were making earlier to the other students sir, let me give you an example of what I mean.” The student looks around the room and asks, “Is there anyone in the class who has ever seen the professor’s brain ?” The class breaks out into laughter. “Is there anyone here who has ever heard the professor’s brain, felt the professor’s brain, touched, or smelt the professor’s brain ? No one appears to have done so. Therefore, according to the established rules of empirical, testable,

demonstrable protocol, science says that you have no brain, with all due respect, sir. So if science says you have no brain, how can we trust your lectures, sir ?”

Now the room is silent. The professor just stares at the student, his face unreadable ! Finally, after what seems an eternity, the old man answers, “I guess you’ll have to take them on faith.” The class breaks into a deafening applause.

## Guru Granth Sahib— A Universal Scripture for World Peace<sup>1</sup>

The relevance and significance of *gurbani* for world peace can be understood if we discuss the answer to the serious question quite often asked from the author at the Sikh youth camps:

### The Question

Why not abolish all religions ? From the very time of their founding, they have divided people into mutually hating groups. Moreover, this hatred is spreading and being intensified every day. We have witnessed shedding of innocent blood all over the globe and unfortunately, it is going on even at this time. Is, then, there any logic for retaining religion ?

### The Answer

Many scholars, who have studied Guru Granth Sahib, agree that *gurbani* provides the answer to this question. The message of Guru Granth Sahib, *gurmat*, popularly called Sikhism, preaches, “Do not divide people into Hindus and Muslims; all are children of God, hence equal. No one is superior or inferior and no one is alien.”

This philosophy is elaborated in hundreds of hymns which all of you know; only four of these are quoted below :

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1. Paper submitted for the *International Conference for World Peace* held in December 2003, at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar regarding the Fourth Centennial of Guru Granth Sahib.

1. I am neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, my body and soul have been gifted to me by Allah and Ram.<sup>2</sup>
2. We all are children of the same one Father.<sup>3</sup>
3. God Himself has created all the human beings, the same Light being the source of all life, how can people (by birth) be divided into good and bad persons.<sup>4</sup>
4. When I got into the company of the holy people, the feeling of otherness got washed away from my mind.

Now, I find that all persons are the members of my family, neither anyone is my foe nor anyone is alien to me.<sup>5</sup>

Ram and Allah are two of the innumerable names of the same Lord. In *gurbani*, both these names refer to the Creator, the Common Father of the whole humanity, not the God either of Hindus or of Muslims alone. *Gurbani* accepts all the innumerable names given to Him by His devotees of different cultures and faiths. Many such names have been mentioned in Guru Granth Sahib.

This philosophy did not remain a theory for our intellectual exercise. The Gurus demonstrated its practicability through the institutions of *sangat* and *panyat*. Hindus and Muslims, high caste and low caste, men and women, all sat together as equals (*sangat*) to sing the praises of the Lord, their common Father, addressing Him by many different names with equal love. To share their feelings of brotherhood, they cooked food together and partook of it together (*panyat*) without any kind of discrimination.

## Thread of Peace

Where and why have we missed this lesson of *gurbani* ? We need to reintroduce it to spread the message of the unity of

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2. ਨ ਹਮ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ॥ ਅਲਹ ਰਾਮ ਕੇ ਪਿਛ ਪਰਾਨ ॥ (p. 1136)

3. ਏਕੁ ਪਿਤਾ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ ॥ (p. 611)

4. ਅਵਲਿ ਅਲਹ ਨੂਰੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੇ ਸਭ ਬੰਦੇ ॥  
ਏਕ ਨੂਰ ਤੇ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਉਪਜਿਆ ਕਉਨ ਭਲੇ ਕੇ ਮੰਦੇ ॥ (p. 1349)

5. ਬਿਸਰਿ ਗਈ ਸਭ ਤਾਤਿ ਪਰਾਈ ॥ ਜਬ ਤੇ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਮੋਹਿ ਪਾਈ ॥  
ਨਾ ਕੋ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ ॥ (p. 1299)

humanity. It should be an issue to be discussed by scholars and social leaders to plan the celebration of the forthcoming fourth centenary of Guru Granth Sahib. Accordingly, they should draw an action plan to pick up the thread of peace and move forward to create peace all over the globe by developing mutual love among all sections of society.

This does need sacrifice, of course, not of our heads as during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but surely of our ego so that we learn to respect others as equal members of the larger brotherhood, the humanity. Unfortunately, we see the believers of *gurbani* strongly divided among themselves. *Gianis*, scholars, politicians, heads of different *deras*, etc., differ a lot on the details of the message of *gurbani* and the code of conduct prescribed for a Sikh.

The institution of Guru Panth which was to provide a common platform for keeping the Sikhs united and moving on the *gaadi raah* (highway of *gurmata*) has slowly been diluted unrecognizably, and hence made ineffective. Maybe, this appeal will awaken us to the message of *gurbani* and remind us of our responsibilities as believers of *gurmata*. Let us make a beginning, God will surely bless us.

Another revolutionary aspect of the revelations of the *gurbani* is that nobody can claim a monopoly over God. The *Gurbani* explains that *He is our Common Father and He loves us all equally*. ਤੂੰ ਸਾਡਾ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਬਾਪੁ ਹਮਾਰਾ ॥ (p. 97)

Hatred arises when the followers of a faith preach themselves to be the only true believers and regard members of other faiths as non-believers. With a wrong belief of 'saving' members of other faiths, they actually bribe, pressure, torture and even threaten to kill them (sometimes they do kill them to persuade others), all to generate more converts to their faith. Many people in power are, as in the past, still committing this serious sin, which also is a crime, but believing it to be a pious act. While they think they are doing a favour to the 'non-believers' (people of other faiths) to save them from the assumed Hell, they create a *real hell* for them on this very earth.



*Gurbani* decries such forced conversions by declaring, “*God is nobody’s father’s property to make a sole claim on Him. He belongs to all those who love Him.*”<sup>6</sup>

In addition, *gurbani* tells that *He* graces all those who remember Him.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the Sikh prayer always ends with a request for the welfare of whole humanity, *Sarbat da bhala*, not just of Sikhs or of Indians alone. (History tells us that the Gurus and the Sikhs put this prayer into practice at the cost of their own heads.)

## Struggle for Human Rights

a) To ensure peace, Guru Nanak preached protection of human rights, particularly of the lowly and the weak. *Gurbani*, therefore, warns the tyrannical rulers and administrators against their inhuman actions. It says that true kings are those who respect truth and deliver justice to common persons; only such persons deserve to be rulers.

- i) *Delivering justice is the responsibility (duty) of a king.*<sup>8</sup>
- ii) *Only a competent person who understands Truth should occupy the throne (become a ruler) so that he can deliver justice.*<sup>9</sup>

Guru Nanak exposed tyrannical rulers, corrupt religious teachers as well as corrupt judges through very harsh and strong words. They were compared with blood-sucking beasts.

- i) *The kings behave as blood-sucking beasts and their officers act as biting dogs.*<sup>10</sup>
- ii) *The judge (the authority for justice) is corrupt (He takes bribe). The Brahman and Yogis (religious authority for spiritual guidance) suck the blood of the innocent*

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6. ਆਪਨ ਬਾਪੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਿਸੀ ਕੋ ਭਾਵਨ ਕੋ ਹਰਿ ਰਾਜਾ ॥ (p. 658)  
 7. ਜਿਨੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇਆ ਗਏ ਮਸਕਤਿ ਘਾਲਿ ॥ (p. 8)  
 8. ਰਾਜੇ ਚੁਲੀ ਨਿਆਵ ਕੀ ॥ (p. 1240)  
 9. ਤਖਤਿ ਰਾਜਾ ਸੋ ਬਹੈ ਜਿ ਤਖਤੈ ਲਾਇਕ ਹੋਈ ॥  
 ਜਿਨੀ ਸਚੁ ਪਛਾਣਿਆ ਸਚੁ ਰਾਜੇ ਸੋਈ ॥ (p. 1088)  
 10. ਰਾਜੇ ਸੀਹ ਮੁਕਦਮ ਕੁਤੇ ॥ (p. 1288)

*followers (by charging heavily for performing meaningless rituals). All these are responsible for the problems of the people.<sup>11</sup>*

b) On the economic front, he condemned the dishonest and corrupt people who take away the rights of others, describing them as the greatest sinners.

*Taking away the rights of others is like eating beef by a Hindu and eating pork by a Muslim (a most sinful act, one loses one's faith if one commits that act).<sup>12</sup>*

Further, to help the needy, he advised that one tenth of one's earnings should be shared for social welfare. He said that serving the poor is serving God.

c) To ensure social equality, he founded the institutions of *sangat* and *pangat* as stated earlier. Splitting of society into high caste and low caste by birth is strongly decried by *gurbani*.

i) *Do not claim any superiority over others because of your caste, it is the act of an idiot, it leads to many ills.<sup>13</sup>*

ii) *All humans form a common fellowship. O God, You are not an alien to anyone.<sup>14</sup>*

The pride of caste is basically wrong and harmful. We are all equal and no one is alien.

## Universal Brotherhood in Practice

The character of the Khalsa to respect people of all faiths during the 18th century is well documented. I wish to quote a small incident of the 20th century also to show how the Sikhs treated people of other religions with love. About two decades ago an old man, unable to walk on his own, and supported on both

11. ਕਾਦੀ ਕੂੜ ਬੋਲਿ ਮਲੁ ਖਾਇ॥ ਬਾਹਮਣੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਜੀਆ ਘਾਇ॥  
ਜੋਗੀ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ਅੰਧੁ॥ ਤੀਨੇ ਓਜਾੜੇ ਕਾ ਬੇਧੁ॥ (p. 662)

12. ਹਕੁ ਪਰਾਇਆ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਉਸੁ ਸੂਅਰ ਉਸੁ ਗਾਇ॥  
ਗੁਰੁ ਪੀਰੁ ਹਾਮਾ ਤਾ ਭਰੇ ਜਾ ਮੁਰਦਾਰੁ ਨ ਖਾਇ॥ (p. 141)

13. ਜਾਤਿ ਕਾ ਗਰਬੁ ਨ ਕਰਿ ਮੁਰਖ ਗਵਾਰਾ॥  
ਇਸੁ ਗਰਬ ਤੇ ਚਲਹਿ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਵਿਕਾਰਾ॥ (pp. 1127-28)

14. ਸਭੇ ਸਾਝੀਵਾਲ ਸਦਾਇਨਿ  
ਤੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਨ ਦਿਸਹਿ ਬਾਹਰਾ ਜੀਉ॥ (p. 97)

sides by two burly Sikhs, was led out of the Ross Gurdwara, Vancouver, Canada. His harsh Panjabi words expressed his great frustration and anger for not finding non-Sikhs in the gurdwara. “Why have you brought me here? This also is not the Gurdwara where we all ‘brothers’, Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Goras (European Canadians) jointly cooked langar and partook of it together.” The emotional outburst of the old man brought tears in my eyes, and that touching scene was engraved on my heart forever. He was one of the early Indian settlers in Canada. During those days every person, whatever his caste or country, found food and shelter in the gurdwara, then at 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in downtown.

However, against this old practice of all communities having mutual love, the recent *langar Hukamnama* has divided even the Sikh community, particularly in B.C., Canada, into irreconcilable groups. Each gurdwara *sangat* has been split into two—*kursiwala* gurdwara and *pangatwala* gurdwara; the hatred among them is as strong as that between the two different communities, Hindus and Muslims, in Kashmir.

In Panjab also, we observe very strong mutual differences among the leaders of the Panth. Therefore, it is increasingly being realized that Guru Panth needs to be revealed and strengthened to overcome the problems of the Sikh community all over the world. Without this institution, we cannot spread the message of the Granth. (ਅਗਰ ਪੰਥ ਨਾ ਰਹਾ ਤੋ ਰੁਖਿ ਕੋ ਕਉਨ ਮਾਨੇਗਾ ॥). Only Guru Panth can direct all Sikh leaders to resolve their mutual differences and move together on the path of *Gurmat*.

## Silver Lining

Luckily, the nucleus of the Panth, the *sangat*, is still devoted to Guru Granth Sahib. We can observe trainloads of people of different faiths and different communities coming from all corners of India and also from foreign lands to pay their homage at Sri Harimandar Sahib, Amritsar. There we also observe that all communities of different colors and features every day enter

*langar* halls and partake of food together as equals without discrimination. Go to any local gurdwara, and you will find the *sangat* devoted to the Guru Granth, *kirtan* and *katha* of *gurbani*. (It is only during elections that the leaders split them to “capture” gurdwaras for their selfish ends.)

This is a very encouraging situation. Before the selfish and opportunist leaders can do any damage to this unity of the *Sangat*, they should be guided by the Panth to follow the directions of *gurbani* so that its message of peace can reach all corners of the globe.



## Section B

Episodes  
Related to Sikh Youth



## Are the *Janam Sakhis* True ?

I was studying (9<sup>th</sup> class, 1943-44) at the Khalsa Collegiate School, Amritsar, Panjab, when we were told that Guru Arjun Dev kept some pages blank in the Pothis Sahib, the first compilation of Guru Granth Sahib, in 1604. The blank pages were purposely left for writing the hymns of the Ninth Nanak, Guru Tegh Bahadur. The *sakhi* raised many questions in my mind but I did not dare to ask anyone about them.<sup>1</sup> There are many other *sakhis*, the historicity of which is doubted by even sincere and devoted Sikhs. Some Sikhs, however, believe such *sakhis* to be true to every word, written or told, about them.

The most important case before the Panth is that of the selection of the *Panj Pyaras* on the *Vaisakhi* day of 1699. According to one narration, the Guru called for a Sikh to offer his head to quench the thirst of his sword for blood. Bhai Daya Ram got up and offered himself before the Guru, who swung his sword with full force and chopped off his head with one stroke. After the heads of the five Sikhs, one by one, were thus cut off, the Guru sent for the Satluj river water to clean the blood off their bodies. Not considering which head belongs to which body, he just put one head with each body and covered them with a white sheet.

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1. The assumption that blank pages were left for writing the *gurbani* of the ninth Guru, is actually not correct. The fact now accepted is that for each new set of hymns, a new packet of papers was started and the left over pages in each packet were kept blank. (They were not left for writing the hymns of Guru Teg Bahadur) As a result, about one fourth of the pages remained blank.

After covering the bodies, the Guru prepared *amrit*. He lifted the cloth from the face of the beheaded Sikhs, and put *amrit* in the mouth of each one. Immediately each Sikh became alive and uttered with a loud voice, *Waheguru, Waheguru* five times. These five Sikhs were named *Panj Pyaras*.

Many Sikhs do not believe this to be literally true. According to them, the Guru desired some Sikh to come forward who was willing to sacrifice his head for protecting the faith (This has already been done during the time of Guru Arjun Dev, Guru Hargobind and Guru Tegh Bahadur). The Guru held the volunteer Sikh by the arm and took him to a nearby tent. The Guru then returned to the stage with the bloodstained sword. Some add to this version that the sound of using the sword was heard and a stream of blood was seen coming out of the tent.

As we know, there are many other versions and beliefs about what happened that day. Well, there is only one correct version, the one that actually happened. Which one was it ? It needs to be investigated by the historians and scholars. Can they do it now ? To determine this, we have to understand how the *sakhis* were initially written.

I had been wondering why a *sakhi* is told in so many versions, some obviously un-believable by even a sincere devotee. For example, during his *udasis* (journeys) Guru Nanak is said to have occasionally told Bhai Mardana, “Bebe Nanaki (sister of the Guru) has prepared a nice puffed *phulka* (chapati), she is thinking of us. Close your eyes.” When Bhai Mardana opened his eyes, they were in Sultanpur in the house of Bebe Nanaki.

## **How the versions changed**

All *sakhis*, as is already known to the readers, have more than one version, sometimes even with different basic facts. Before we discuss the truthfulness regarding these *sakhis*, I share with you an episode experienced at a Sikh youth camp; from this episode I learnt, how to understand and believe a *sakhi*.

I was surprised, rather became tense and got worried, to find



the *sakhi* of Guru Nanak and Sajjan *thug* being made unbelievable when retold by a young trainee, a second grade student. I taught Sikh heritage to the students at the Sikh youth camp held in Duncan, Vancouver Island, B.C., Canada. The junior students were told *sakhis* related to the life of Guru Nanak Dev. The concluding session of the camp was held on Sunday morning in the gurdwara, and the hall was full with *sangat*.

The student stated, "There was a *highway* from Lahore to Multan (both cities are now in Pakistan); Sajjan built a *motel* on the highway." His statement was obviously wrong because there were no highways and no motels in Panjab during those days. On hearing that I was very much embarrassed and it created tension in my mind. However, his next statement, "The travelers forgot their toothpaste tubes and tooth brushes..." gave me a clue and brought peace to my mind. The description of the *sakhi* became a great lesson for me.

It was clear to me that the student, to make the *sakhi* understandable to the *sangat*, 'corrected' it by using the current words to convey the meaning of the story. Not only did he modify the words, he also added his own experience to make the *sakhi* a natural happening and thus convince the audience to believe it. He adopted the word *highway* to replace the word *major road* used by me and the word *sarai* (inn) was changed to *motel* (a hotel for the motorists on the highway). Regarding forgetting of things by the travelers at the inn, the student was reminded of his own experience of forgetting his toothpaste and brush in the bathroom when hastily packing for returning home after the camp.

These changes, introduced by the students, made the *sakhi* improbable because there were no highways or motels during those days in Punjab. In addition, the toothpaste and brushes were not known then at all.

When the boy finished his talk, it was my turn to explain the 'mistakes' made by the young student. I stated, "*Sangat ji*, we have listened to the boy and observed his enthusiasm to convince us about the correctness of the *sakhi*. To make the *sakhi* acceptable to us, not only did he replace some words but also added his own

experience. *These honest changes, instead of assuring us about the truth of the sakhi, as intended by him, made the historicity of the sakhi doubtful, rather improbable.*"

The camp was over but this lesson continued coming repeatedly in my mind. On a couple of occasions, I talked about this episode with my friends. One of them told me, "Modern scholars agree that the narrators do inject their personal bias when describing a story heard or read by them. Because of the personal mindset of the listener, he/she interprets the same version differently. By the time, the fifth person tells the sixth listener a new version, different from the one told by the first person, is created. The first narrator on listening to that version denies having told that story."

Dear reader, now think of the *sakhis* related to Guru Nanak during his *udasis* to different parts of Asia meeting people of different ethnicities, different cultures and different beliefs. The *sakhis* spread orally from one person to the other, from one culture to another, and from one generation to the next. This continued until the sixth Nanak, Guru Hargobind, when the *sakhis* were for the first time recorded on paper. A very large number of versions were created by that time. This is confirmed by the study of about half a dozen old (original) *janam sakhis* and their later copies that are available to us. We find today that not only were those *sakhis* re-written with the writers' imagination changing the original words and statements to express their own belief, but also many new *sakhis* continued to be added to them. The popular *Bhai Bala Janam Sakhi* written in 1658 had 75 *sakhis* and its copy written in 1820 has 130 *sakhis* (I am told it has now 500 *sakhis*; obviously, many *sakhis* were added by the later writers to make the book better than the previous one).

If we want to know the correct version of the *Vaisakhi* of 1699, it would not be possible. Even if the original record of the episode written by one of the *Panj Pyaras* were available to us today, the authors and narrators, who describe it to the masses, would create many versions of the same *sakhi* because each would interpret it differently, according to his own inner belief and

feelings. The listeners accept that version which appeals to their minds and they share it with other people by further changing the emphasis.

## Faulty Transmission

Later in Chandigarh, I shared my experience of how the student narrated the Sajjan *thug* (in the oldest *Sakhi* book, the name used for the person is Bhola Chore, a naive thief) *sakhi* and made it doubtful. Stating his own experience regarding interpreting *sakhis*, a senior Sikh scholar told us, "One day when we were watching TV, the pictures suddenly disappeared, and only the moving lines were visible on the screen. My grandson wanted to adjust the antenna placed on the TV box. I told him not to touch the antenna because he had not done anything to disturb it. Soon the lines stopped and there was a message on the screen : *Do not adjust your TV, the transmission is faulty.*"

The scholar concluded, "We should not adjust the details of the *sakhis* to 'correct' them, we should accept that their transmission is faulty. Continuous additions, deletions, modifications, and re-interpretations of the *sakhis* make them doubtful. Sometimes new *sakhis* are created which are even against the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib or which lower the status of the Gurus to just that of magicians. Do not get concerned about the details of the *sakhis* to investigate their being true or not. The objective of narrating *sakhis* is to tell us the teachings of *gurbani* as revealed through the lives of the Gurus. Just understand the lesson, which fits with the message of *gurbani*. Ignore the details, or even the whole *sakhi* if its message goes against *gurbani*. Do not try to correct the *sakhi* to make it believable. Otherwise, you will further distort and create more doubts about the Sikh history."

To my surprise at a camp in USA, one young student involuntarily drew the same conclusion and in a very convincing way. When one student asked me, "*Baba ji*, are these *sakhis* true ?" The other boy immediately reacted, "Is the story of the race

between hare and tortoise true?" Hearing him, the class got attentive and I was anxious to hear his further comments. The boy continued, "Just learn the moral lesson and forget the details, they are designed by the writer/narrator of the *sakhi* only to explain the message." Everybody was convinced with his answer and without any further observation, we all left the classroom.

### P.S.

1. Like faith, *sakhis* are there in science too and they have their own significance. To give an example, every student of science is told how Archimedes was emotionally taken over by the joy of his discovery. He ran naked out of the bathtub to tell his discovery of the principle of floating bodies. He found that articles when in water lose weight equivalent to the weight of water displaced by them. The students of science value only this principle discovered by the scientist and do not get involved in the details of the episode connected with the discovery because the details may or may not be historically true.

They ask, "Were the people waiting at his door to hear his discovery?" The statement actually expresses his high emotional feelings at his sudden incidental discovery. For us to understand from the story is the aspect of his emotional feelings, the details are designed to express those feelings; hence, scientists believe and utilize his discovery but do not care about the story of his discovery.

Similarly, the students of faith (spirituality) are expected to learn and value the lesson of a *sakhi* and not get stuck with the details of the episode used to describe it. There are some *sakhis* common in many religions. The words used to describe them are coined to make the *sakhi* interesting and attractive to the listeners. That is why they change from one tradition to the other. The moral lesson, which needs to be valued, however, remains the same.

2. Most of the *sakhis* have a historical base but their historicity gets modified every time it is re-written or re-told to make it acceptable in the new locale. Historicity of the *sakhi* thus

gets lost. Let it be repeated again that we, the devotees should value the spiritual principle (moral) preached by the *sakhi*. However, in many cases we, particularly laymen, ignore the principle and get impressed by the details of the *sakhi* which are stated to make it impressionable and understandable to a layperson.

In some cases, we may not agree with the details accepting them to be just a mythology and hence fail to benefit from a *sakhi*. We should not try to devalue the message of the *sakhi* because commonsense does not accept its historicity.

3. *Sakhi* literature is a perfect and beautiful amalgamation of both history and mythology. It is also colored with the love of the author for the Gurus and their unlimited holy powers. The writers, while recording the life of the Gurus, also included as many episodes as they knew about other holy men, particularly the miracles associated with them. The *Janam Sakhi* literature should be studied keeping these facts in mind. To treat it as history written by a historian and attempt to evaluate its correctness is misreading the text and losing the benefits of its study. Such scholars not only confuse themselves about the historical contents of the *sakhis* but they also misguide their readers about what the *sakhis* really intend to tell us.

In some cases, the lesson of the *sakhi* may not agree with the message of *gurbani*, rather it may be against the teachings of *gurbani*, such *sakhis* may be rejected lock, stock and barrel.

ਹੁਕਮੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਤਾ ਨਿਰਮਲੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਹਉਮੈ ਵਿਚਹੁ ਜਾਏ ॥  
ਹੁਰ ਕੀ ਸਾਖੀ ਸਹਜੇ ਚਾਖੀ ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਅਗਨਿ ਭੁਝਾਏ ॥

*When a person is blessed by God, his/her ego is destroyed  
and the mind is sanctified. His mind is calmed, he listens to  
the teachings of the Guru, and the fire of his desires is  
extinguished.*

## I Have Decided to Become a Sikh

At the Tri-State, Pittsburgh, USA camp, I gave a lecture regarding 'Relevance of *gurbani* for the modern world'. When I was coming out of the classroom, a senior student told me, "I have decided to become a Sikh". It was difficult for me to understand the meaning of her statement, because I knew her parents, who were devoted Sikhs. Further, she herself behaved like a Sikh from all aspects; she kept uncut hair and she could recite *gurbani*.

Without giving any response, I continued walking with her and thinking about what she intended to tell me. After a brief silence, she completed her question, "*Baba ji*, I want to know the goal fixed for the Panth by Guru Nanak when he founded this faith. What has the Panth done so far to achieve that goal ? And what is left to be done by me to achieve that objective so that I may be accepted as a Sikh ?"

Listening to it, I was immersed into a deep sea of thinking, "God ! What a great Sikh she is. How come I have spent my whole life without putting this challenging question to myself ?" The sincere words said by an innocent young Sikh shook me and awakened me to look inside myself. With me still drenched in these thoughts, we reached near the dining hall. I responded, "God bless you. We are proud of you young Sikhs who think on these lines. Surely, we will talk about it in the class tomorrow." She left for her next class and I took a break for tea.

While taking tea, her statement continued ringing in my ears, I could not think of any references to answer her inquiry, "Define the goal of the Sikh faith for society and the religious path to be

adopted by the Sikhs to realize that goal.” Further, how the remaining mileage is to be covered (how the mission assigned to the Khalsa Panth is to be achieved) by the present generation, was an equally complex question for me. I thought that Sikhs should not have forgotten their goal as a community, and the Panth should have addressed themselves to find an answer to that question.

I continued thinking for a suitable response to be given in class the next day. After lunch, I went to my cabin and lay in my bed. My mind screened *gurbani* teachings, Sikh beliefs and Sikh history but the answer eluded me for a long time. Finally, the hymn commonly sung on the birthday of Guru Nanak, written by Bhai Gurdas *Var 1 Pauri 27*, came into my thoughts and gave me the lead for developing the answer. The hymn says, “*When the sun, Nanak, arose all the mist and darkness (ignorance) in the world vanished.*”<sup>1</sup> The *Var* refers to the problems of the people and the solutions introduced by the Guru to help people. I studied the *Var* and related references to prepare my talk for the next day. What I discussed with the students is briefly mentioned below :

i.) Bhai Gurdas explains that humanity lived in peace, but later it got into trouble by splitting itself into high and low castes; it also grouped itself into hierarchical sects of yogis and *sanyasis*. People were further divided into many faiths because they worshipped different deities and each deity was claimed to have superiority over the others. When the Mughals arrived, they intensified the problem by forcing Islam on the Indians already divided into multiple faiths.

ii) Bhai Gurdas, in his poetic style, then states that the earth was unable to bear the ‘weight’ of sins committed due to mutual hatred among the people and the practice of falsehood everywhere. The earth, therefore, begged God to send a savior, and God deputed Guru Nanak for this job. This defines the mission of Guru Nanak in authentic words.

iii) After telling about the mission (to unite the split

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1. ਮਿਟੀ ਧੁੰਧ ਜਗ ਚਾਨਣ ਹੋਆ॥

humanity, teach people to give up hatred and practice mutual love) assigned by God to Guru Nanak, I told the students :

- a) “The contributions of the Gurus are well known to all of you. You can, now, understand the background and the great significance of the first sermon of Guru Nanak - “*no one is a Hindu and no one is a Muslim.*” The message of the sermon for us is not to divide society into different creeds, castes or any other classes because they are all man-made differences. God creates us equal; no one is inferior or superior; no one is alien, we are one big family having our common Mother-Father, God.
- b) We have also studied the institutions (*sangat, pangat*, common *baoli*, common *sarovar*, and common *gurbani*) that were introduced by the Gurus and made popular to remove our attitude of feeling inferior, superior, or different from other people. This defines the goal intended by the Gurus to be achieved through these institutions.
- c) Finally, there is the founding of the institution of the Khalsa, when people were urged by the Guru to give up their differences because of their previous faith (*dharm*), caste (*kul*) etc. All people were welcome to drink *amrit* from the same bowl and live as equals in every respect. They were accepted as the spiritual sons and daughters of Guru Gobind Singh and Mata Sahib Kaur. They were to have, therefore, the same common names of Singh and Kaur for all men and all women, respectively. The duty assigned to the Khalsa was of saint-soldiers (Legions of the Lord of Peace) – to protect human rights of the weak, uproot tyranny, and preach truth.

iv) After reviewing the Guru history, I concluded, “We find that Guru Nanak was deputed by God to unite the split humanity and create mutual regards among the people. It was achieved during the Guru-period. To continue to spread this message, to maintain peace and serve society, the tenth Nanak passed on the



responsibility of the Guruship to the Khalsa. The mission of Nanak, thus, is an ongoing process. It is for us to see what we can do to convey this message to every human being keeping in mind the religious, social, and political beliefs of the people. We have to convince people that they are equal members of the large family, we call humanity. Hating anyone or considering a person inferior is a sin. This is the message of Nanak for maintaining peace in the world.”

v. I ended my talk with the suggestion, “Dear youth, we see that this is an ongoing assignment given to us. You are welcome to discuss this issue to decide your duties/responsibilities during your life to help achieve the mission laid down by the Gurus. Now it is up to you to define what you should do, and what you can do, to maintain love and peace among the people.”

After this, it was the turn of the trainees to contribute their thoughts. They remained busy even the next day discussing and deciding the role they must play to justify their being Sikhs. The outcome was very lively and interesting; many trainees developed their own views regarding their individual responsibilities to be performed as a Sikh.

## Are You Also...?

My eyes were flooded with tears during two episodes, which took place while dealing with my associates. Their hidden feelings were expressed involuntarily, in one case with great pleasure and in the other case under great fear. Their utterance reminded me of a great lesson of Guru Nanak's teachings, which can bring peace and pleasure in the present strife-torn humanity. The irony is that instead of learning *gurbani*, understanding its messages and utilizing them for building world peace, we Sikhs ourselves are getting away from them.

Maybe, these two episodes, I am recording below, motivate the Sikhs to share the great *gurmat* lessons with people all over the world and enjoy the pride of being Sikhs by contributing their bit to the world peace. (Also read *Ovation to Guru Nanak*, Episode number 1, Volume I)

### A) Are You Also...?

During the mid seventies, I joined the Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana after the completion of my deputation to Delhi. Being the senior most teacher, many friends and staff members knew, or at least assumed, that I would be the next dean in a few weeks time. I was shown, probably because of this, an unusual respect by everyone. This honor did inflate my ego. Even when I tried not to, I could not help nursing a hidden feeling of a superior person, something unnatural to me.

One hot day, after spending a couple of hours in the sun while studying the progress of field experiments, I returned to my

office and ordered a glass of water. Because of my intense thirst and the inordinate delay of the messenger boy (earlier known as peon) to return with water, I lost my cool. When he returned empty-handed, I was upset and in loud words asked, "Why didn't you bring water?"

The boy with a trembling voice said, "I have asked Mr. A (he named another person)." Hearing those words many wrong thoughts circled my brain to find the cause of this insolence. Trying not to reveal any of them, I simply yelled, "Have you become a big *sahib*? Why did you not bring water yourself?" The boy in a slow and almost inaudible voice said, "Sir, I am... I am a ..." rubbing both of his hands indicating his helplessness being not entitled to bring water for me. I heard his unsaid words very loudly. My boiling body and mind were suddenly frozen as if by the subzero winters of northern Canada.

Uncontrolled tears flooded my eyes and I argued with myself, "Five centuries ago Guru Nanak told us that we all are children of the same Father, hence equal; we were taught this lesson by making us sit together as equals in *sangat* and *pangat* and behave with all other people as our brothers and sisters. How come this Sikh<sup>1</sup> cannot today even offer a glass of water to another Sikh? How can we move together as a Panth of equals?"

I was overwhelmed by our failure to popularize this straightforward practice, which demanded nothing more than a simple change of attitude. My emotions pressed hard on my Sikh nerve and I wanted to give up my job at that very moment, hang a drum from my neck and beat it in every street telling people "We all, whether born as Muslim or Hindu, so called high caste or low caste, are equal because we have a common Father, God. These labels are man-made identities; God does not recognize them at all."

While I was drowned in these thoughts, the other boy brought the glass of water. I thanked him and told him to place

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1. He was wearing a turban and keeping his beard flowing. I do not remember whether he was an *amritdhari* or not.

it on the table and depart. My thirst had gone after listening to the messenger boy's words. I told him to spill it over in the nearby sink. Without acting, he looked at me with surprised eyes. I continued, "Look ! They (I meant high caste people) do not drink water from our hands; I will not drink water from *his* hands. You go and bring another glass of water with *your* hands." Before I had completed my sentence, I observed that my words had given an electric shock to his 'dead' self-esteem and provided him a new life, which was visible from a sun-like glow on his face. His eyes reflected an immeasurable self-esteem. This newly gained self-esteem tore away all curtains including those of the caste and our official positions between us. As a friend, he asked me in Punjabi, "*Tu bhi ohi hai* (Are you also ...)?" He did not have to say any more words because his whole body was reflecting his mind. I responded, "Yes I am also..." He too fully understood my answer, "Like you, I am also a 'low' caste."

After this episode, I dropped my caste name and wrote an official circular to that effect. My changed name without caste now appears in all my legal documents including my bank accounts, passport, etc. (Some friends now create problems for me when they use my caste name.)

## **B) No ! Jats Will Beat Me**

After returning to the Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana from Delhi in the mid seventies, an urgent family assignment of getting a tubewell installed in our fields was waiting for me. I tried to complete the job as quickly as possible. Immediately after that, I was to go to Amritsar, and one young Sikh, who worked with me in the fields, expressed his wish to accompany me to visit Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. I already had decided to pay my obeisance there; I welcomed him to go with me. For having a dip in the holy *sarovar*, I handed over my clothes to him. When I was through, he handed over his clothes to me to take his turn for his bath. Both of us returned very happy and he told me that his long-standing wish to visit the holy city was fulfilled.

A couple of days after returning from Amritsar, we worked together in the fields. We decided to take a shower before returning to the village. The tubewell was switched on and I jumped in the small tank where the water fell out of the pipe. When I looked around for the worker, I found him bathing on the bank of the channel a few yards down. I called him, "Come on here, the water in the channel is not clean, and the tank is big enough for both of us to take shower together." He gave the usual answer, "*Sardar ji*, it is alright here for me." Understanding his reluctance, I gave a second call to him, "Did we not bathe *together* in the Amritsar *sarovar*. Take your shower here along with me, that water is dirty." He repeated his answer again, "Water is okay here," and he continued putting water on his body with a big bowl which was his own and kept at the tubewell for drinking water.

For the third time I used some forceful commanding words to ask him to come to the tank. In response, involuntary words came out from his mouth, "*Nahin ji, Jat kuttan ge* – No ! The jats will beat me afterwards." After listening to him, I could not open my mouth to speak. Actually, my mind was struck very hard and I could not think of any words to express my feelings regarding this social injustice prevailing so commonly in the land of Guru Nanak. This young worker did not smoke (Ravidasia Sikhs are sometimes accused of this); he tied a turban and did not trim his beard, a *kureht* commonly seen being committed by the so-called high caste and rich Sikhs.

His father and many other people from that *mahalla* (block) attended the same village gurdwara, where about four decades earlier I used to go as a boy. That day I could understand why they built a separate gurdwara (Gurdwara Ravidasian) in their own *mahalla* ? As an attempt of, however, small significance it may be to reduce this caste distinction, I visited their gurdwara whenever the so-called Ravidasia Sikhs held a function there. Of course, it was unwelcome to some of my close relatives. I also ignored their advice, "If you have to go there, you should not eat their *parshad*."

## P.S.

Will these two episodes touch the minds of the Sikh leaders, both religious and political, to do whatever needs to be done to revive the Sikh philosophy of equality of humanity or, at least, equality of the Sikhs ? These two episodes have been mentioned to highlight the fact that a bold warning written on the wall could be seen many years ago. However, it was not read or considered serious by the community. The result is before us. We must worry at the situation and do something to save the unity of the Panth at this eleventh hour (rather, this may be called the twelfth hour because we are already quite late). The Sikhs are split caste-wise, and separate 'gurdwaras' have been built and named as Gurdwara Ravidasian, Gurdwara Ramgarhian, etc. *The community leaders need to sit together and collectively think of a solution; this needs to be attempted on war footing.*

The so-called Ravidasia Sikhs address *Bhagat* Ravidas as *Guru* Ravidas because of the wrong belief that the title of 'Guru' is superior to the title of 'Bhagat'. This new title, *Guru* Ravidas, is meant to send the message that Ravidasi Sikhs are not inferior to the other high caste Sikhs; they are equal to them because they have their own *Guru*, equivalent to *Guru* Nanak, as the founder of their faith. They (note that *they alone*, not joined by the mainstream of the Sikh community) conduct a procession on his birthday and do everything the Sikhs do on the birthday of *their* founder, *Guru* Nanak. Ravidasi Sikhs now call their '*gurdwara*' *Guru* Ravidas *Mandir* to completely differentiate themselves from the Sikhs and claim equality with them as an independent faith.

In addition, we have failed to observe that Ramgarhia Sikhs celebrate Vishav-Karma day as *their* religious day with greater devotion and more enthusiasm than when they celebrate the birthday of *Guru* Nanak.

After five centuries, the feelings of caste pride or otherwise among the Sikhs have emerged again with equal force. Are the Sikhs sleeping ? We cannot afford to forget that one of the major contributions of the Gurus to Indian society was to destroy the

caste barriers by systematic planning over two centuries. The two great institutions of *sangat* and *pangat* taught the first lesson of equality of humanity. The *baoli* and the *sarovar* were made open equally to all people, Hindus and Muslims, low-caste and high-caste, etc. Influenced by these institutions, the bonds of brotherhood got strengthened which were made permanent with the teaching of *sarb-sanjhi gurbani* :

ਤੂ ਸਾਝਾ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਬਾਪੁ ਹਮਾਰਾ ॥

we are all children of the same *one* Father-Mother.

Finally, any residue of the caste feeling was washed off from the core of the people's hearts when Guru Gobind Singh offered *amrit* to be sipped from the same bowl by all. Every Sikh accepted it and gave up all old distinctions including those of the caste and creed. They accepted the *Nash* doctrine and were proud of their spiritual birth in the Sikh faith. They were granted a new surname, 'Singh' or 'Kaur', to be recognized as the spiritual son or daughter of their spiritual parents, Guru Gobind Singh and Mata Sahib Kaur.

*Are the Sikhs listening ?* If so, they must start to practice and vigorously preach the message of *sangat* and *pangat* (*equality of humanity*), the foundation of the Sikh faith, to adopt the mission of Guru Nanak and make efforts towards maintaining peace in the world.

ਨੀਚਾ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਨੀਚ ਜਾਤਿ ਨੀਚੀ ਹੁ ਅਤਿ ਨੀਚੁ ॥

ਨਾਨਕੁ ਤਿਨ ਕੈ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਾਥਿ ਵਡਿਆ ਸਿਉ ਕਿਆ ਰੀਸ ॥

ਜਿਥੈ ਨੀਚ ਸਮਾਲੀਅਨਿ ਤਿਥੈ ਨਦਰਿ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਖਸੀਸ ॥

*I am lowliest of the lowly, and I love their company;  
I do not join the ego-filled because God blesses those who  
care for the lowly.*

## *Gian*, a mere Mental Load

As a boy, I carried the impression that any person, who recites *Gurbani* orally and who preaches *gurmat*, must be an ideal Sikh free from all vices. Such a *giani*, I believed, deserved all regards from common Sikhs like me. To my surprise, when I dealt with such *gianis*, I found in some of them the presence of one or the other vice in their private life.

Later, I myself learnt *nitnem* and became an *akhand-pathi*. Then the truth was revealed to me that having learnt *gurbani*, one might continue to suffer from the vices. In my case, I observed additional vices *nindya* (calumny) and *eerkha* (jealousy) hidden deep in my mind. I feel ashamed of my weakness and my inability to have any control over the vices, even after learning *gurbani gian*. I did make sincere efforts to control them but I failed and the vices continued to bother me.

I was privileged to have been associated with Sant Teja Singh of Mustuana who founded the Akal Academy Trust Baru, Himachal Pardesh. Once during an evening walk with him, I narrated the above problem to him. He listened to me but continued his walk without any response. After some minutes, he stopped and advised me, “Gurbakhsh Singh, God creates all human beings and in their minds He Himself places *haume* (ego), the root cause of all evils.” He recited hymns to explain the message to me.

God has Himself planted *haume* (ego) in the minds of human beings.<sup>1</sup>

1. ਹਉਮੈ ਰੋਗੁ ਮਾਨੁਖ ਕਉ ਦੀਨਾ ॥ ਕਾਮ ਰੋਗਿ ਮੈਗਲੁ ਬਸਿ ਲੀਨਾ ॥

(p. 1140)



Many living beings lose their life because of just one weakness (vice). What hope is there for a man having five vices in him to save himself ?<sup>2</sup>

Further, also think of the last *slok* of the Asa ki Var.

God has bestowed us our body; He Himself fills some with milk (peace) while He places others on fire (gives them worries and disturbances)....His grace alone can bring peace to one's mind.<sup>3</sup>

After reciting *gurbani* hymns, *Sant ji* resumed his walk and I followed him repeating these hymns, keeping in my mind their message.

After some minutes, *Sant Ji* again stopped and continued his advice, "Pray to Him for peace, recite *gurbani* hymns all the time. Keep your mind always engaged in the love of God and never let it remain vacant to think of vices. Remember ! You may not still be able to check the vicious thoughts rising in your mind but you should try to stop your body from moving to act under their influence. If you cannot resist the temptation to act, sit down on the floor, or better lie down. Tell your mind firmly that it may go anywhere it wants to but you will not let your body be directed by it to commit sins. Slowly the influence of the vices on the mind will get weaker; hence, fewer and fewer vicious thoughts will arise in it. When you submit to the immoral and wrong thoughts of your mind, it gets stronger and thinks of more serious vices."

While returning, I tried to analyze why even after learning *gurbani*, one may not become a virtuous person. I now understand that it is the most difficult task to control the mind.

To control the mind is as difficult as to win the world.<sup>4</sup>

A couple of days after this while reciting *gurbani*, the hymns

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2. ਮ੍ਰਿਗ ਮੀਨ ਭ੍ਰਿੰਗ ਪਤੰਗ ਕੁੰਚਰ ਏਕ ਦੋਖ ਬਿਨਾਸ ॥

ਪੰਚ ਦੋਖ ਅਸਾਧ ਜਾ ਮਹਿ ਤਾ ਕੀ ਕੇਤਕ ਆਸ ॥

(p. 486)

3. ਆਪੇ ਭਾਭੇ ਸਾਜਿਅਨੁ ਆਪੇ ਪੂਰਣੁ ਦੋਇ ॥

ਇਕਨ੍ਹੇ ਦੁਖੁ ਸਮਾਈਐ ਇਕਿ ਚਲੈ ਰਹਿਨੁ ਚੜੇ ॥...

ਤਿਨ੍ਹਾ ਸਵਾਰੇ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਜਿਨ੍ਹ ਕਉ ਨਦਰਿ ਕਰੇ ॥

(p. 475)

4. ਆਈ ਪੰਥੀ ਸਗਲ ਜਮਾਤੀ ਮਨਿ ਜੀਤੈ ਜਗੁ ਜੀਤੁ ॥

(p. 6)

which explained to me the root-cause of this paradox (why even *gianis* are not free from vices), touched my heart.

*Of what use is the study of the scriptures, if one did not learn to love God (become virtuous) ? In that case the 'gian', acquired from the study of the scriptures and retained in the brain, is like a load of sandalwood (a valuable scent-emitting wood) being carried by a donkey (who is not aware of the scent, he just carries the load). Without developing virtues, how can one cross the sea (of vices) ?* (p. 1103)<sup>5</sup>

Our *gian* should guide us to love God (love people, be humble and serve humanity). Instead, in our brain we carry the 'weight' of this *gian*, to claim our superiority over others. We do not take advantage of our *gian* for the real purpose of becoming wise, that is, to inculcate virtues in our mind and to replace our *haume* (the root-cause of our vices) with them. Most of the times our orations and writings are intended to reveal our greatness (and it intensifies our *haume*, rather than decreasing it). For such persons, the *gian* stocked in their brain only acts as a weight, and 'hurts' rather than helping them.

To benefit from the message of these hymns, let us pray that He helps us to take advantage of their *gian*, and in this light we keep our vices under control.

ਗਿਆਨੁ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਕਥੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੋਈ ॥ ਕਥਿ ਕਥਿ ਬਾਦੁ ਕਰੇ ਦੁਖੁ ਹੋਈ ॥  
ਕਥਿ ਕਹਣੈ ਤੇ ਰਹੈ ਨ ਕੋਈ ॥ ਬਿਨੁ ਰਸ ਰਾਤੇ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥

*Many people just talk about being 'giani' (holy people), but they suffer from ego and make their claims through fake arguments. Few can restrain themselves from such talks; however, one cannot enjoy His blessings without acquiring His virtues.*

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5. ਬੇਦ ਪੁਰਾਨ ਪੜੇ ਕਾ ਕਿਆ ਗੁਨੁ ਖਰ ਚੰਦਨ ਜਸ ਭਾਰਾ ॥  
ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ ਕੀ ਗਤਿ ਨਹੀ ਜਾਨੀ ਕੈਸੇ ਉਤਰਸਿ ਪਾਰਾ ॥

## Bare-headed Sikh in the Gurdwara

A Sikh from Victoria visited Vancouver and came to the heritage class meant for the youth. After the class was over, he asked me to visit Victoria and address the senior class of a Christian school, which his son attended. The classmates of his son often asked him, "Why do you wear a turban?" The son did not know how to respond to such questions regarding his faith. I was expected to talk to the students of his class and answer their questions regarding Sikh faith and the Khalsa Reht. (About my lecture in the school, see episode No. 17 Vol I.)

When I disembarked from the boat, my host with his friend received me at the port. Even before I got into his car, his friend asked me, "Can a Sikh come to the Gurdwara bare-headed?" My quick reply, of course, as expected by him, was "No". The real question, however, was the second one, "Where is it written in Guru Granth Sahib?" I gave a routine reply, "I will show you later." Anyway, I could not give any other short response while sitting in the car. When we reached home, the issue was forgotten by us because I got busy talking to the son of my host.

Next day, we went to the gurdwara. After the morning *kirtan* was over, I was asked to give a talk regarding the message of *gurbani* for the modern youth. During my lecture, a bareheaded Sikh entered the hall, bowed before Guru Granth Sahib and took his seat. Nobody outside or inside the gurdwara hall told him to cover his head. I was shocked to see a Sikh without a head-cover in the gurdwara for the first time in my life. I was reminded of the question asked from me a day before. No Sikh could tell him,

“Where is it written in Guru Granth Sahib ?”, therefore, no Sikh asked him to cover his head.

I lost my concentration and could not help answering the previous day’s question before I could talk about anything else. What I said may be restated briefly as below :

It is a great pleasure for me to know that some Sikhs look to Guru Granth Sahib to guide them in all aspects of their lives. Yesterday, a Sikh asked me, “Is it written in Guru Granth Sahib that one must cover his/her head to attend the gurdwara ?” My reply to him is, “Yes, it is written in the same hymn in which it is stated that one should come to the gurdwara wearing clothes. I have never seen any Sikh coming to the gurdwara without clothes. I always find everyone dressed properly. This means they have read that hymn that a Sikh must come to the gurdwara in proper dress. I am sure if one has read the second part of the hymn that wearing clothes is essential to visit the gurdwara, he cannot miss the first part, which says that covering one’s head is also an essential requirement for visiting the gurdwara. I, therefore, assume that if a person wearing clothes on his body insists to enter the *devan* hall without covering his head, he is deceiving himself.”

Before I had concluded my talk, the man with the bare head had left the gurdwara. I was told that he never put that question again to any Sikh.

Dear readers, the game-book only states the rules of the game and not the uniform of the team that decides to play that game. The manager of the team decides the uniform. *Gurbani* reveals *gurmat*, the spiritual lesson, and the philosophy of life to be adopted by a person of any religion or of none. It is not supposed to mention anything about the dress code a devotee of a specific religion should follow. Guru Gobind Singh decided the dress code for the Sikh faith, and all Sikhs have to accept it. Anyway, wearing a head cover at sacred functions is a worldwide culture, not just an Indian, or a Sikh culture.

It will surely interest the reader that wearing a turban is a practice as old as the written history of humankind. It was an

essential garment in the west also. The Old Testament mentions the requirement of tying turbans by the devotees (next episode: #6). In the so-called advanced western culture, which does not always respect traditional values, a bride at the time of her marriage still feels honoured to cover her head and face by a veil. The requirement of covering one's head is not peculiar to the Sikh faith; it is an ancient worldwide culture of the civilized people. (also see episode 8B-2 of this volume)

## Why Do You Wear a Turban ?

During my visit in 1985 to Vancouver, B.C., Canada, to address the Sikh youth, two devoted Sikhs from Quesnel (about 500 miles north of Vancouver) came to meet me. We had long discussions in Panjabi regarding the message of *gurbani*, the basics of the Sikh faith and the Sikh Reht Maryada. Both visitors were fully satisfied with my approach to teaching Sikh heritage to the youth. Because I could talk in English, the language their children easily understood, they invited me to conduct a Sikh youth camp in their city.

One evening, a Sikh lady approached me to help explain the uniqueness of the Sikh faith to the Christian Women's Association of Quesnel. In the gathering, there were some fifty women and about a dozen men.

My talk did not draw the attention of the listeners. Even my slow and clear talk did not seem to be meaningful to them. Therefore, after about 8 to 10 minutes I concluded my talk and said, "This is all I wanted to share with you. In case there are any questions, I will be glad to answer them."

Here is their first and the last question, "Why do you wear a turban ? How can a turban be related to any religion ?"

Later on, I came to know that there was a Sikh woman who wore a turban, and was the leader of a political party. She was a popular figure in the town, particularly among the women. The women's group had invited her for a discussion about the need and importance of turban in the Sikh faith. She had to go to Vancouver to attend an urgent meeting of her political party; her assignment, therefore, was passed on to me.

This episode happened about 20 years ago, sometime in the mid eighties, and I do not remember how exactly I started to answer this question. However, I do remember vividly my daring and apparently senseless action as it appears to me today. I will never dare to do that again, and I never did. I feel lucky and am thankful to God that I could come out safely without leaving any ill will in the minds of the audience. Surprisingly, they got a complete and fully satisfying answer to their query regarding the Sikh turban.

I invited one person (about sixty years old) to come to the stage. When he was standing by my side and everyone had their eyes and ears tuned to us, I addressed him, "Sir, may I request you to take off your trousers?"<sup>1</sup> Everybody got silent and waited for the response from the man. Whenever I remember this episode, I get a chill in my backbone even now.

The man gave a polite answer. In a low voice without expressing any anger or feeling insulted, (I bow to the person for being so good. I always talk about the greatness of that person during my informal talks with my friends and I present him as a role model for us), he said, "No, it is against good manners." My purpose was achieved. Immediately I apologized to him, "I am very sorry for my wrong request, and regret it sincerely," The man, without saying any word, calmly went back and occupied his seat.

Addressing the audience, I continued, "Let us go back to discuss religion. Let me know how many of you have studied the Bible." To my surprise, only three hands were raised but that was enough for me to answer their question regarding the turban. I

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1. A few weeks earlier I had read in an article a reference to the Old Testament about the requirement of wearing a turban by the devotees. It directs them to cover their heads, body and loins. Maybe, because of this information, I nursed a wrong reaction in my mind to hit the western people back with their own stick if they even ask me any question regarding my turban. To be sure of this statement in the Bible, I went to the library of the University of British Columbia to refer to a copy of the ancient Bible, got its English translation from an expert and the same is given in the next para.

continued, "Well friends, we should be happy and thankful to these three ladies because they are here to endorse what I am going to quote from the Bible (Old Testament)."

I referred to Ezekiel 44:18-19, where it is stated, "*Once they enter the gates of the inner court they are to wear linen vestments; they should wear linen turbans and linen drawers on their loins.*"

After explaining the importance of the messages of the Bible, I observed, "We should be thankful and obliged to our friend (pointing to the gentleman who was called to the stage). He has explained to us, and very correctly so, that wearing trousers is good manners and now we all know that it is a requirement according to the Bible. The quotation teaches us that all the three clothes, turban, vest and trousers are a religious requirement for every person. Removing any one of these three is ill-mannered.<sup>2</sup> Sikhs are, therefore, required to wear all the three garments." I chose not to elaborate that according to the Bible removing turban, like taking off trousers, is also bad manners. That would have hurt the self-esteem of the listeners.

To conclude the discussion, I reminded them of the reverse change being wrought in the dress code of human beings by the modern half-baked philosophy. "To begin with, you know, we lived naked like animals and roamed in the jungles for gathering our food. We may call that stage as animal-man stage. Slowly we developed our human behaviour and human culture of wearing clothes. Thus we became what we are today, humans (cultured man).

"Throwing away this human culture, which we have developed during the thousands of years of our history, means going back to the animal culture, or in other words becoming an animal-man again. Because of the modern fashion to be clothless, some thinkers have formed nude colonies. There are dozens of them in Texas, USA, alone.

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2. A friend of mine went to tour Europe. To my surprise, he told me that visitors without wearing long trousers were not allowed to get into a historical church. The church had arranged to hire out long pants at the gate for those visitors who wore shorts.



The culture of believing in religion also differentiates us from the four legged species. They have no idea of spiritual life. We, being religious persons, must follow the directions of the Bible and feel satisfied by living that way. We should not slide back to the animal culture by giving up our religion.

The discussion ended in a positive rapport between the speaker and the listeners. The audience smiled after hearing my last words, indicating their satisfaction regarding the conclusion of my talk. They were a religious group and my recommendation (and the logical justification for it) that we must live a religious life as directed by our scriptures pleased them all. It very well fitted in their philosophy. I believe they got an additional lesson valuable for teaching their children the significance and necessity of respecting the principles of their faith. They could argue with their children that without following religious code we slide down to the animal culture, and thus could convince them about the necessity of practising religion in their lives.

I was told that next day a local paper carried the top news, "Wearing turban is an essential garment—Dr Singh quotes Bible."

### **P.S.**

I did not mention the Sikh code of conduct requiring the Sikhs to wear turbans because I had found the audience had little interest in knowing the principles of the Sikh faith.

## Why does my Mind Wander when I Recite *Nitnem* ?

A camp was planned by the management of the gurdwara in Houston, Texas, USA, during Christmas vacation. It was fixed to suit my availability. During summer vacation, I was too busy participating in the youth camps in Canada and northern USA to travel the long distance to the south. The weather there during winters is very pleasant. It was the first camp in that town, therefore, the parents also attended the evening session of that camp.

On Sunday morning when the camp was to be concluded, a lady met me outside the prayer hall of the gurdwara and asked a very unusual question, “*Baba ji*, when I do my *nitnem* recitation, my mind always slips away and gets busy in thinking something else. I try my best but I do not know why it starts wandering repeatedly. This continues until the completion of the *nitnem* and it makes me feel guilty. What should I do to control my mind ?”

I knew the woman and I had visited her house a couple of times earlier. A very brief reply was given to her, “Thanks, we will talk about it.” While sitting in the *sangat* and waiting to be called to the dais to give a concluding talk to the campus youth, I argued in my mind, “When you cannot keep your own mind tuned to *gurbani* while reciting *nitnem*, how can you answer this question ? Further, this topic does not even concern teaching Sikh heritage to the youth, for which you were invited to the camp. Therefore, you better avoid it. She herself may forget to ask this question when she happens to meet you again.”

However, her question continued to occupy my mind and did

not let me concentrate on the theme of my lecture. In that moment of stress, I got an idea to answer that question. Accordingly, my mind planned to discuss this common difficulty faced by all the Sikhs, both young and old. What I told the *sangat* that day, was as below :

This morning when I reached the gurdwara, I was asked a question which concerns all of us. It is, "Whenever I start reciting *gurbani*, my mind slips away again and again. How should I keep it tuned while I do my *nitnem*?" All of us experience it daily. To understand the reason for this, let us first discuss the case of another parallel act. Just think for a moment, when you read your morning newspaper (we read it everyday and, for some of us, it is like the *nitnem* duty) does your mind go away? I know that all of you will answer 'no'.

Now, we can figure out why our mind gets out of control while reciting *gurbani* and not when reading a newspaper. This happens even when we read both of them in the morning within a short space of time. You will agree with me that we recite *gurbani* to complete the recitation as a *required formality*, while the newspaper is read by us because *we want to read it* to know what it tells us.

Here lies the difference and the reason why our mind wanders only when we read *Gurbani* and not when we read a newspaper. As our mind is interested *to have the information* contained in the newspaper, it remains connected with the matter it reads. I think the same thing can happen if we tell the mind to read *gurbani* to know its message for us.

We read *Japji* daily; but how many of us can tell a non-Sikh the summary of the spiritual message of *Japji* in simple words? I was reminded of this weakness of my own mind at a youth camp when one student asked me, "*Baba ji*, tell us ten major messages of *Japji*."<sup>1</sup> I responded, "I cannot answer your question offhand, I will discuss it with you tomorrow." In the evening, I retired to a quiet corner and started reading *Japji* with the purpose of

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1. Probably, the student had Ten Commandments of Moses in his mind for the followers of the Bible and he assumed that there must be the corresponding ten messages of *Japji* for the Sikhs.

choosing the messages for the daily life of a Sikh. To my pleasant surprise, my mind did not wander away even for a moment, though it took me more than an hour to read and summarize the messages I would convey to the youth.

*Sangat ji*, let us try this method. Every Sikh will choose a different set of messages for himself/herself. The core of the mind of every reader is touched by different *pauris* depending upon his/her previous *gian* and spiritual feelings. It also depends on our mood at the time of our reciting *gurbani*. We may make a note of about half a dozen hymns, which deeply affect our mind. Just try to keep your mind tuned to enjoy those hymns spread over the whole of *Japji*. This approach helps us maintain better control over the mind than we can have otherwise.

## P.S.

I enjoyed reading *Japji* for studying its messages for the students. When I discussed those messages with the youth, we found it very helpful to understand the Sikh philosophy. Therefore, I decided to write a tract in English describing the complete set of messages of *Japji* for the youth. On their suggestion, it was later enlarged to include So-dar (Rehras), Sohila and Anand Sahib, the *nitnem banis* from Guru Granth Sahib. All these translations have been published in the form of a book, *The Message of Japji*. (Available from Canadian Sikh Study and Teaching Society, # 108-1083 East Kent Ave, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada, Phone / Fax (604) 327 4147, and Sikh Missionary College, 1051/14 Field Ganj, Ludhiana, Punjab).

ਮਨ ਖੁਟਹਰ ਤੇਰਾ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਸਾਸੁ ਤੂ ਮਹਾ ਉਦਮਾਦਾ ॥  
ਖਰ ਕਾ ਪੈਖਰੁ ਤਉ ਛੁਟੈ ਜਉ ਉਪਰਿ ਲਾਦਾ ॥੧॥ਰਹਾਉ॥

*O my tricky mind ! You cannot be believed because you always think of mischief. Therefore, like a donkey whose legs are tied (to stop him from kicking) before unloading him, you must be kept always engaged (in recitation of His virtues or doing sewa) to keep you on track.*

## Learning Lessons from a Preacher

### A) Effective Message

The management of the gurdwara in Dallas, Texas, USA, conducted a one-week Sikh youth camp every year. I was also invited to participate in that camp. The camp was inaugurated after the Sunday morning session in the gurdwara. The opening ceremony was attended by all the prospective trainees, their parents, management members, and volunteer Sikhs who were assigned duties concerning the conduct of the camp.

I used to address the *sangat* every year on the theme of the camp, and how the discussions would be related to the daily life of the youth. I suggested the youth to learn Gurmukhi to be able to recite *gurbani* and do their *nitnem* regularly. The youth were also briefly advised in my lecture to resist any temptation to try alcohol or any other drug. I always gave this advice in very mild words to avoid putting off the youth. My lecture was followed by the gurdwara *giani ji*, who was to conclude the morning *diwan*.

*Giani ji*, a very close friend of mine, questioned my approach in strong words. He stated, “Professor *Sahib* ! You know that ਲੀਰਾਂ ਜੋੜ ਕੇ ਕੋਟ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀਤਾ ਜਾਂਦਾ, one cannot stitch a coat by joining small pieces of rags. Why don’t you tell the youth in clear words that to be a Sikh ਬੋਤਲ ਸੁਟੋ—ਪੋਥੀ ਚੁਕੋ, *throw away the bottle* (do not touch alcohol or any other drug), *pick up the nitnem pothi* and start reciting *gurbani* every day.”

A three-minute message by *giani ji* (Sardar Jagjit Singh Sidki) was more effective than my 30-minute lecture. I too learned the lesson that unless the message is delivered unambiguously and

effectively but respectfully, it does not mean much to the audience.

## **B) Preaching Problems**

Once I was invited to Dallas during winter to teach *gurmukhi* (Panjabi) to the youth. I was free for most of the time during the day. Therefore, I decided to stay in the gurdwara to have *gurmat* discussions with *giani ji* and learn from his experience. I was very much impressed with his understanding of *gurbani* and Sikh philosophy. He told me that his father was also a *giani* in a gurdwara in the West Panjab (Pakistan). I learned many lessons from him, which changed my mind and approach to teaching Sikh heritage to the youth.

I often faced the problem of explaining the necessity of retaining uncut hair and wearing turbans, to those who were raised in Panjab and already knew about this essential requirement. How was I to motivate them about keeping long hair when they, according to their own free will, wanted to conform to the western culture of the majority community ?

My second problem was my information that the majority of the Sikhs visiting gurdwara sipped alcohol without any reluctance, whenever it was available or was offered to them. A few Sikhs viewed drinking as a symbol of status. In my mind, the real difficulty to talk against drinking was caused when even some members of the management were known to have these shortcomings.

However, *giani ji* was equally anxious to share with me his own problems of preaching *gurmat*, and the solutions, which he had found. Therefore, he responded, “First you must listen to what I learned in this gurdwara since I came here. I criticized the anti-*gurmat* practice of celebrating *Sankrant* as a Sikh festival.” I was very happy that he was going to talk frankly, without any reservations. I became attentive in order to benefit from his narration.

*Giani ji* told, “To begin with I preached that *Sankrant* (first

day of the Bikrami month), *Pooranmassi* (full moon), *Massya* (no moon), and other such days are believed to be sacred in Hindu philosophy. These particular days depend upon the position of the sun and the moon, which are considered gods by Hindus and, therefore, are worshipped by them. *Gurmat* rejects this philosophy, stating that *those who worship these days as sacred are idiots*.<sup>1</sup>

“My repeated sermons every month reduced the number of the Sikhs, who attended gurdwara on the *Sankrant* day, from more than 120 to about 50. Awakened by the actual outcome of my negative statements, I gave up this approach and revised my sermons.”

Anxiously, I interrupted, “Do you now say these are sacred days for the Sikhs also?”

He continued, “*No, listen*. Now, I give the same message in positive words. *sangat ji*, it is a sacred day today for all of us because we have found time to enjoy *gurbani kirtan* and reflect on its message for us. May God grant you the full benefit of this sacred day! The benefits we obtain, as you know, depend upon, not the day or the date we visit gurdwara but upon how attentively we listen to *gurbani* and take advantage of its directions. You can enjoy this benefit not only on the *Sankrant* day but also on every day whenever you visit gurdwara.

“Therefore, you do not have to wait one full month for this sacred day. You can obtain the benefit of a *Sankrant* visit every time you come to the gurdwara and listen to *gurbani*. Being Sikh, we must take full advantage of our life by attending gurdwara as often as possible. This way we can receive the benefit of many sacred *Sankrant* days during each month, not just on one day only.”

## Solution of the Preaching Problems

At another time, *giani ji* and I sat together to decide our approach to *gurmat* preaching. We had a long discussion on these issues. We worked out many ways to give the message to the

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1. ਬਿਤੀ ਵਾਰ ਸੇਵਹਿ ਮੁਗਧ ਗਵਾਰ ॥

(p. 843)

*sangat* in positive terms. We were not fully satisfied with the outcome of our discussions. However, we did agree on some positive interim statements to face those situations. What we decided to say in our lectures regarding the maintenance of Sikh insignia and avoidance of alcohol without hurting the feelings of the listeners, is as below :

i) *Turban* : The significance of the turban may be described by giving examples as below :

We know that the police and the army in every country wear with pride the uniform assigned to them by their governments. All teams require their players to wear the uniform prescribed for them. Even large private organizations give uniforms to their staff for creating a positive image. The uniform identifies the organization to which the wearer belongs; for the individual, it provides the honour of being a member of that organization.

An American Sikh scholar best expressed the significance of the Sikh turban at the 1985-86 International Sikh Conference held in Detroit. After the lectures in the conference, the scholars were invited to address the *sangat* in the gurdwara on Sunday. A European-American Sikh (white person) explained the significance of the Khalsa uniform very emotionally from his own experience.

He said, “When I tied my turban, my family disowned me and my friends also left me. I will not care if, because of my turban, all my old friends desert me. I know that, with my turban and beard, I am identified as a son of Guru Gobind Singh. Is there anything more valuable than this in the world ? I do not keep my hair for any economic benefit or physical advantage to my body. I proudly wear the insignia of a Sikh without which nobody will accept me as the son of Guru Gobind Singh, the greatest person, in the world.

“Kings wear a crown. Their kingdom is founded by the sacrifices made by their mercenary soldiers. Therefore, another king with a stronger army may defeat him and take away the crown from him. However, our crown, we call turban, has been granted to us by our Guru who has paid the full price of this crown



by the blood of his own family including all four of his sons. No person and no government<sup>2</sup> can take it away from us unless we ourselves become ungrateful and throw it away.”

We may conclude, “I do not think any Sikh preacher can convey the importance of retaining hair and wearing turbans in any better way than what was said by the American Sikh. We, born in the Sikh faith, must enjoy the pride of being the children of Guru Gobind Singh.”

Similar episodes may be known to the speakers, which they may tell the *sangat* to provide the self-esteem for respecting the turban and maintaining uncut hair by the Sikhs.

In the talk, it needs to be told that the practice keeping uncut hair and wearing a turban started during the period of Guru Nanak. According to the record of the Rajasthan archives, Guru Nanak loved all people equally but did not approve the use of raiser by his associates.

We both agreed that nothing should ever be said, even indirectly, to offend the Sikhs or non-Sikhs who do not wear turbans. Such observations do not motivate the Sikhs to start wearing turbans, rather they make them allergic to turbans.

ii) *Alcohol* : Regarding alcohol we may tell :

Use of alcohol is not a modern phenomenon. During ancient times, people and even gods are mentioned to have used such drinks for elation and excitement. Yogis used alcohol for meditation (concentration of their thoughts). These days, because of its aggressive advertisements, misuse of alcohol has ruined many people. Even though the *gurbani* declared it a taboo, some Sikhs, perhaps because of their ignorance, are known to drink alcohol.

We know that it is definitely harmful to our health.

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2. Now the Sikhs with turbans can join any post including the police in Canada and USA. Sikhs have special permission to retain their turban and ignore the hat of the uniform. Of course, in some cases, they had to go to the courts for this. After seeing a Sikh in full police uniform and wearing his turban (which makes him *Sardar ji*) one involuntarily utters, “Guru ! You and your sincere Sikhs are great. God is always with them everywhere.”

Therefore, the governments are doing their best to curb drinking. They have placed strong warnings on every bottle. We find many alcohol-related accidents killing not only those who drink and drive but also others whom they hit. In this way, thousands of American lives are lost and many families are ruined every year. Hence there are laws against drunk driving, drinking in public places, and the sale of alcohol to minors.

Such an informatory talk may be followed by the statement, “What a great favour the Gurus have done by prohibiting the consumption of alcohol by the Sikhs !” It may be endorsed by quoting hymns from *gurbani*, which prohibits the consumption of alcohol by all people.

The talk may be concluded with the message: Think of the honour the Sikhs as a community will earn if people know that Sikhs are teetotalers because they respect the principles of their faith. No police officer will stop a Sikh driver for the drunk-driving test. Let us decide today to listen to *gurbani* and not touch a bottle in the future. We must obey *gurbani* not only to build a positive image of the community but also for our personal good health and safety.

## **P.S.**

We discussed many alternatives but I am giving only one as a sample in each case so that the speaker can use a positive approach for mentioning any shortcoming of the Sikhs, without hurting the feelings of those who happen to have that limitation. A speaker can think of better ways for advising the Sikhs to respect the code of the Sikh Maryada, but he must not ridicule, criticize, or offend any person in the *sangat*.

## Anger, How to Control it ?

We have all experienced pleasant feelings when our achievements, services, scholarship or other virtues are recognized and good words are said about us. Most of us might have also been upset over offensive words about ourselves from someone. We lose our temper and retaliate with harsh words of our own. We commit the offence of using such words only when we are angry. During a casual dialogue, if we are not angry and our temperament is normal, we express our differences in acceptable, maybe forceful but not harsh words.

Anger, like alcohol, is well known to suppress our rational behaviour. In some ways it is even worse. A sudden and steep rise of anger is an involuntary act, it takes control of our senses in seconds. To express its harmful effects, a rhyme was told to me when I was still a schoolboy :

Remember ! When anger is on,  
One loses ones' senses, right or wrong.

My friend Baba Iqbal Singh, President, Kalgidhar Trust, Baru, Himachal Pradesh, and I once learned a very valuable lesson to control or at least reduce the influence of anger on our minds so as to be able to bear it. After our final B.Sc. examination at Khalsa College, Amritsar, we went to Sant Teja Singh who was then staying at Paonta Sahib, Himachal Pradesh. One day when we came out of the gurdwara and were walking through the outer porch, two people sitting there made some comments in Panjabi to ridicule us.

First :     Do you know that the Sant has brought—ਦੋ ਪੜ੍ਹੇ ਲਿਖੇ ਤੋਤੇ

—two educated parrots.

Second : Yes, I was told they are BA pass.

First : That is why they say ‘*kit bit, kit bit*’.

Second : Let us see how quickly they fly away (leave Sant).

We heard these oblique comments making fun of our education but we kept mum, being very new to the people and the place. We were, of course, very angry. When we reached home, we reported the matter to *Sant ji*. He ordered us, “Sit in that corner and repeat one hundred times the hymn :

ਹਮ ਨਹੀ ਚੰਗੇ ਬੁਰਾ ਨਹੀ ਕੋਇ ॥ ਪ੍ਰਣਵਤਿ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਤਾਰੇ ਸੋਇ ॥

Anyone, who believes that he is not good and none other is bad, overcomes the turbulence in his mind.” (p. 728)

After we completed our recitation requirement, we were advised, “You yourself must always move on the right path. Do not mind such criticism. When you do not react, such people, on their own, will feel ashamed of their immoral/unsocial act, and they themselves will give it up later. Maybe, some people will continue to stick to their bad habit, but even then *you do not get involved with them*. ਮੂਰਖੈ ਨਾਲਿ ਨ ਲੁਝੀਐ ॥ (p. 473). In that case they may hurt only themselves but not you.”

I have benefited a lot from this advice, hence, I wanted to share it with my readers.

ਪੰਡਿਤ ਬੇਦੁ ਬੀਚਾਰਿ ਪੰਡਿਤ ॥ ਮਨ ਕਾ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਨਿਵਾਰਿ ਪੰਡਿਤ ॥੧॥ਰਹਾਉ॥

*O Pandit ! Reflect on the message of holy teachings and get rid of the anger from your mind (to enjoy peace).*

ਹੇ ਕਲਿ ਮੂਲ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੰ ਕਦੰਚ ਕਰੁਣਾ ਨ ਉਪਰਜਤੇ ॥

ਬਿਖਯੰਤ ਜੀਵੰ ਵਸੰ ਕਰੋਤਿ ਨਿਰਤੰ ਕਰੋਤਿ ਜਥਾ ਮਰਕਟਹ ॥

*O anger ! You are the cause of all problems (strife and quarrels); you do not have any feelings of pity (love) but you can control only immoral people and make them dance like monkeys.*

## May the Government be Doomed

Windsor, Ontario, Canada, is very close to Detroit, Michigan, USA. Some Sikhs from Windsor come to Detroit on Sunday for the morning *diwan* in the gurdwara there. After my lecture in the gurdwara sometime in the end of 1984, they wanted me to visit Windsor to conduct evening classes for both the youth and their parents. It was the first opportunity for me to talk to the Canadian youth.

Once, when the prayer was offered in the Windsor Gurdwara, it was ended with the following words : ਹੇ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ, ਹਿੰਦੋਸਤਾਨ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਦਾ ਬੇੜਾ ਬਹਿ ਜਾਵੇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮ ਚੜਦੀ ਕਲਾ ਤੇਰੇ ਭਾਣੈ ਸਰਬਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ ॥ *O God ! May the Indian Government be doomed. Nanak says may Your Naam be ever triumphant; may there be good and welfare of all according to Your will.*

These words, which many in the *sangat* probably did not even hear, surprised me. These were the days when, after the army attack on the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, innocent Sikhs in Panjab were being picked up and killed by the police. The feelings of Sikhs all over the globe were very much hurt by the cruelties inflicted on their community.

When the *sangat* was departing for their homes, I went to the Sikh who had offered the prayer and sat close to him. He respected me a lot, because he attended the *gurmat* classes conducted by me in private homes during the weekdays. In a serious tone, I asked him, "I did not understand the words of the prayer said by you. I think you should have requested God ਹਿੰਦੋਸਤਾਨ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਤੋਂ ਬਿਨਾ ਬਾਕੀ ਸਰਬਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ ॥ to bless the whole humanity but doom the Indian Government."

Showing confidence in me as a Sikh scholar, he seriously asked me, "Can the end sentence be changed like that ?" I repeated his original Panjabi words and asked, "That's what you wished, but you were not clear what you requested God to do." He continued, "What should then I say to condemn the butcher tyrant government who heartlessly murdered innocent pilgrims including thousands of women and children of different religions on the sacred martyrdom day of the Guru (Guru Arjun Dev) ? They destroyed the Akal Takht built by the Guru, we must pray for their destruction so that they do not commit such a crime again."

It was then time for me to explain to him the *gurmata* philosophy. I impressed upon him that a Sikh always wishes well of everyone because all people are his children and are loved by him. If you wish ill of anyone, God is very much displeased. Referring to our discussions in the weekly class, I reminded him of the message of the hymn :

**ਪਰ ਕਾ ਬੁਰਾ ਨ ਰਾਖਹੁ ਚੀਤ ॥ ਤੁਮ ਕਉ ਦੁਖੁ ਨਹੀ ਭਾਈ ਮੀਤ ॥**

To be free from pains and problems, we should not wish ill of anyone, even for him whom we think to be an alien (or our opponent). (p. 386)

It is only for God to decide who is to be treated how for the overall good of humanity. When we pray for the welfare of the whole humanity, it includes stopping tyranny, whether by individuals or by a government.

I explained to him, "There are four hymns of Guru Nanak regarding terrorism and destruction caused by the violent army of Babar during his attack on India. Guru Nanak observed that bloodshed with his own eyes and narrated the miseries of the people in these hymns.

The Guru tells us:

**ਆਪੇ ਕਰੇ ਕਰਾਏ ਕਰਤਾ ਕਿਸ ਨੋ ਆਖਿ ਸੁਣਾਈਐ ॥**

**ਦੁਖੁ ਸੁਖੁ ਤੇਰੇ ਭਾਣੇ ਹੋਵੈ ਕਿਸ ਬੈ ਜਾਇ ਰੁਆਈਐ ॥**

Pleasures and problems are both the gifts of God, to whom can we approach to complain against Him ?" (p. 418)

The Sikh listened to me attentively and understood the

message. He could understand the anti-*gurmat* aspect of the statement made by him during the prayer. I never heard him repeat those words in the gurdwara again.

ਫਰੀਦਾ ਬੁਰੇ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ ਕਰਿ ਗੁਸਾ ਮਨਿ ਨ ਹਢਾਇ ॥  
ਦੇਹੀ ਰੋਗੁ ਨ ਲਗਾਈ ਪਲੈ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਪਾਇ ॥੭੮॥

*O Farid ! Treat even sinful people with love. Do not let your mind be taken over with anger. This way your mind will not be influenced by any diseases (vices) and you can remain virtuous*

## You are a Sexist !

I was awakened to the sensitivity of the western youth against sexism (discrimination on the grounds of sex, particularly against women) during the Tri-State youth camp at Pittsburgh, USA.

The *sakhis* I narrated during my first year at the camp were of male martyrs only. The moral lesson of every *sakhi* was related to some important aspects of Sikh philosophy. I chose a mind-catching title to tell the *sakhis* about the bravery of the Sikhs. It is based on the *slok* of the ninth Nanak :

ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ ॥

Fear none, frighten none,

Love the Lord, Mighty One.

(p. 1427)

The *sakhis* told were, thus, not just episodes of history to be learnt and enjoyed, but also lessons of Sikh philosophy to mould the minds of the youth.

Choosing a moral lesson taught by a *sakhi* was something very interesting to the youth. At the end of each *sakhi*, when I dictated the moral of the lesson in simple prose, they vied with each other to rephrase it in a rhyme form. A few of them are given below. The readers will appreciate the interest of the youth to learn lessons from the *sakhis*. They even memorized these rhymes.

1. Truth is stronger than gun.

Millicns can be defeated by one.

ਸਵਾ ਲਾਖ ਸੇ ਏਕ ਲੜਾਉਂ। ਤਥੈ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਾਮ ਕਹਾਉਂ।

*Martyrdom of Baba Ajit Singh and Baba Jujhar Singh*



2. *Many places in Delhi are there to tell,  
Sikhs love their faith, at no cost do they sell.*  
*Shaheed Baba Banda Singh Bahadur*
3. *A king can take away the life of a Sikh,  
But not his faith or right for worship.*  
*Shaheed Bhai Mani Singh*
4. *Khalsa will remain ever alive  
Oppression they will always fight.*  
*Baba Garja Singh and Baba Bota Singh*

Teaching Sikh history at the camp was very rewarding both for me and for the students. The youth were very attentive in my class and no one wanted to miss my lecture. Rather, they enthusiastically waited for it. Because of this, campers expressed great affection and respect for me.

Next year, on the first day when I went to the class with great hopes of being welcomed by the class, I was surprised to observe that the class gave me a cold response. During the customary talk, "How did you spend your year ?", I came to know the reason for that. A student presented to me a tract describing the *sakhis* told to them during the previous year. Criticizing me he said, "You are a sexist. We don't like it. Why did you not include the *sakhis* of the brave Sikh women in this booklet ?"

I was reminded of the attitude of the daughter of my host, regarding God being mentioned as He. When editing the first chapter of my book, *Sikhism - A Universal Message*, the pronoun *He* used for God was changed to *She* by her.

This experience helped me to understand the mind of the youth; I told them, "The tract was neither shown to me, nor approved by me. I gave the handwritten draft, along with the moral lessons designed by you, to our friend for typing it. Probably, he liked the rhyming of the moral lessons by you and printed some copies of this tract. I myself am seeing it for the first time. Anyway, this year I am going to tell you the *sakhis* of the brave women."

As if the current of their mind was switched on, all faces

started glowing. The intended topic of *sewa* for that year was postponed to the next year. When the book, *Sikh Sakhis for the Youth*, was finalized, accordingly it carried a separate section, The Khalsa Women.

ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ ॥

*Why consider a woman inferior ?*

*' The kings (who rule people) are born to her.*

## Mom ! OK, Two more Years

I was invited to an annual Sikh Youth Leadership camp held in Michigan, USA, in order to discuss important current issues with the participants. I observed one young man playing a good leadership role. He was always precise and organized in analyzing the issues and expressing his views very carefully. He was an *amritdhari* Sikh (Being a leadership camp, maintaining uncut hair and being able to recite *gurbani* is a minimal requirement for attending that camp). I could not hold myself from appreciating the competence of the youth and his devotion to the Sikh faith.

When talking to the director of the camp, I commented about that participant, "How lucky are his parents ?... I am very much impressed by his performance at the camp." The director asked me with surprise, "Don't you know him ?" He then told me the touching background of the boy as below :

He is in the final year of the law school. When he was in his high school, he attended a Sikh youth camp and decided to keep his hair uncut. His parents did not agree to his decision. They insisted that he must cut his hair. The boy noted the aggressive attitude of his parents, particularly his mother, who said, "I cannot handle your long hair; you must go with your father and get your hair cut." The boy said, "Okay. Mom, I will get my haircut as you wish. There are only two more years for you to order me like that. After that, *you cannot touch my hair. You do not know the importance of the uncut hair of a Sikh.* Had you attended only one Sikh youth camp, you would have known their value and would have been pleased with my decision." The youth stopped cutting

hair and took *amrit*. He can perform *Kirtan*, and is one of the senior counsellors at the camp.

I met the boy later at a *kirtan* function in Toronto; he was then a practising Sikh lawyer. There are many such cases where participants attending the Sikh youth camps have adopted new lives. The lesson we can learn from this episode is that, if a youth attends the camp with a receptive mind, it can change his life and put him on the right track.

## *Sants* as Service Bullocks

During my M.Sc. studies (1949-51) at the college of Agriculture (now Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana), whenever Sant Teja Singh of Mustuana visited Ludhiana, I made it a point to meet him. Once I accompanied him during his regular evening walks. I believe that talking about nice habits of a person makes one feel good. Influenced by this thought, I wanted to express my feelings of respect for our host. I observed, "What a great Sikh he is ! He always offers us sumptuous meals, is very humble, and donates money whenever you happen to visit him. When I graduate and get a job, I wish I could live a good Sikh life like him."

Listening to this, *Sant ji* halted and in strong words admonished me, "No. Do not become a Sikh like him." After this advice, he continued his walk and I wondered what was wrong with my wish to be a good Sikh like our host. After some time, he stopped again and told me, "People treat *sants* as service bullocks to work for them. A farmer takes good care of his bullocks, offers them fodder, and provides them full comforts of life. He yokes them to pull the cart, plough the field, and do other jobs. The farmer justifiably becomes the owner of the crops produced by the labour of the bullocks.

"In the same way many people do physical *sewa* to serve the *sants* and expect to obtain the fruit of the holy life the *sants* live.

"Gurbakhsh Singh ! It does not work that way in the field of faith. Association with a preacher can only guide one to learn

the path of *gurmat*. However, one has himself/herself to follow the code of Sikh conduct to become a virtuous person. One must regularly recite *gurbani*, try to understand its message and live one's life accordingly. Giving money and food to the *sants* (but not listening to their teachings) does not help one to control one's mind."

This was the end of our dialogue. We walked together for more than a kilometer and returned without having uttered a single syllable. I remained absorbed analyzing his words and feeling moved. How true his words were ! Both lessons, reading *gurbani* and practising its message, must be adopted with devotion by a person himself. The motivation for living a virtuous life is provided by the recitation of *gurbani* with love and adopting its teaching in daily life. The *sakhis* related to the Gurus tell us that real *sewa* is listening to them and obeying them as well. A devotee benefits to the extent to which he actually practises the message of *gurbani*.

## Shame on You !

When working in Delhi during the first half of the seventies, my duties involved traveling all over India to conduct training sessions for the field staff in different states. Once I disembarked from the plane at the Secunderabad-Hyderabad Airport. When I entered the lobby, a young handsome Sikh came forward and suddenly hugged me with great affection. The officials, who had come to receive me, were a couple of steps away from the gate. They looked at us with surprise. I scoured my mind to think of some clue about the identity of the Sikh so that I could say some words to thank him for his coming to the airport. Unable to connect him to any of my relatives or friends, I felt embarrassed. Therefore, I told him, "I am sorry, I could not recognize you."

Hearing this, his arms, which were tightly pressing me, relaxed. What he uttered with his hurt feelings was a lesson for my life. He murmured some words in Panjabi, which I cannot remember now. The message, however, was engraved on my heart, "Shame on you, you do not recognize me when I am holding you so close. When you just got out of the plane, your turban and beard told me from a long distance that my 'brother', son of my 'father' Guru Gobind Singh, has come to our city. To hug my brother, I took the risk of missing my flight. I have to catch this very plane; therefore, I have to run lest I miss it."

Half of his words were spoken after he had turned his back towards me and hastened to the security gate on the other side of the hall. I spent all the remaining day thinking about my folly. I am reminded of it quite often. However, it is of little use

repenting now. If I had asked his name, I could have traced him, extended my sincere apology to him and requested him to accept me as his 'brother'. I would have learnt many more lessons from my association with him.



## No One Can Tell me to Stop Smoking

I rejoined the Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana, after I completed my assignment at Delhi. After a week or so, a personal assistant joined my office and sent his Joining Report in the regular office dak instead of presenting it to me in person, as was the practice. I had been told earlier that the assistant did not have a good reputation regarding his behaviour. I decided to deal with him with the tool of love rather than using the pressure of my authority. I called him to my room, welcomed him as a friend, and talked with him about his previous experience and his family. To make him feel like a dignified official and not a mere subordinate, I offered him a cup of tea and told him, "I spend most of my time in field work. You are responsible for office work and the image of our division. Now, you may go and take care of it."

Unfortunately, after a few days his son fell ill. I said, "Let us go and see your son." My cousin was a medical doctor in the hospital. We saw him and I requested him, "Please treat this boy as my son." His response satisfied both of us, "Why your son? I will treat him as my son."

After about a month, my assistant invited me for a cup of tea at his house. To my surprise, a couple of his neighbours were also there to welcome me. I assumed that it must be an important day for them to celebrate. However, an unusual question was asked from me by the oldest-looking person among them, "Do you know why we have called you?" It was a signal that something more would be told to me. We occupied our seats and the gentleman continued, "He (referring to my assistant) was advised

many times by all of us, even by his father, to give up smoking but....” His wife interrupted the man by saying, “Here is the quilt” and placed the partly burnt quilt before all of us to see.

This was a puzzle to me, I got interested to listen to the details. The gentleman continued, “Look ! He would have burnt his whole family. He quite often went to bed while smoking. One day the quilt caught fire and he could have been burnt. However, even after this warning by God, he did not give up smoking. What magical advice did you give to him ? Not only did he totally stop smoking but his behaviour has also changed, since he joined your office.”

I felt very comfortable. No comments were needed from me, as it was all said to compliment me. I gave just a one-sentence reply, “I did not even know that he smoked because I never saw him smoking.” However, the next day when I went to my office, I felt interested to know his story. He stated :

“My friends were very pleased when I received my promotion orders. However, one person hurt my ego, ‘Do you know that your boss is a *kirpan-dhari* Sikh ? He will teach you a lesson and stop your smoking.’ I responded, ‘I have handled many bad bosses, what do I care for him ?’ My ego did not let me present my Joining Report personally to you as it was supposed to be done. When you called me to your office, you treated me as a friend and not as a boss. This surprised me. Your previous image, told to me by my friends, was gone and I developed a sincere and honest respect for you.

“I thought it would be a sin for me to come to you just after smoking and upset you with the bad smell. Therefore, during office time I smoked only when I knew that you would be away in the fields for at least a couple of hours. This reduced my expenses on smoking and, therefore, I did not feel tight for money.”

“The day you went to the hospital, we were together for quite some time and I did not feel at all the usual urge to smoke. I found that I possessed the necessary will and strength to quit this

unhealthy habit. I decided that very day not to smoke in the future. The money I saved made me feel relaxed. Because of the absence of tension in my mind, my quarrelling attitude also changed and the whole family became happy. Our whole neighborhood noted this change with pleasure.”

After hearing these details, I thanked the assistant and he left.

The lesson I learnt from this episode was that by practising Nanak’s message of unconditional love, we can develop mutual regards and bring peace to the people around us. The world is a ‘garden’ of people having different colors, forms, and habits, etc. We should marvel at this creation rather than consider others as alien and hate them.

## Sin of 'Breaking' *Amrit*

Sometime during 1985-86, I was invited to the gurdwara in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada for a Sunday function. When I was leaving the gurdwara, a young Sikh whispered in my ears, "*Baba ji*, I have a confidential question, please let us get away from the *sangat*." We moved out into the parking lot, and in the shadow of a van, he continued, "I live in northern Canada and I am in serious trouble. I shall have to commit the sin of 'breaking' my *amrit*. We were told to recite *Rehras* at sunset and get up three hours before sunrise to do our morning *nitnem*. At the place, where I live, the sun sets after 10 pm and the sun rises much earlier than 5 am. It is not possible for me to get up at 2 am when we sleep at 11 pm or so. I shall have to sleep longer and my *amrit* will 'break'. What can I do?"

As soon as he started speaking, I understood his problem. I continued listening to him patiently. We had already discussed this question in Quesnel, about 500 miles north of Vancouver. The nights there, too, are quite short during summer. If we move further north we enter the polar zone, where there is 6-month day and 6-month night, technically one day in a year, because the sun rises and sets only once in a whole year. At whatever latitude we may live, we generally divide our daily cycle in three sections, 8 hours for work, 8 hours for sleep, and 8 hours for routine chores with minor modifications according to the seasons and personal lifestyle.

The young man was visibly relieved of his worries and of the tension in his mind, when I explained to him the rising and

setting of the sun. I told him, “*Maryada* directions are general guidelines. They mean that we recite our *Rehras* before our evening meals. After a full night sleep, we must wake up in the morning so that we have sufficient time for completing our *nitnem* before we take our breakfast and go to work. Do not care at what time the sun rises or sets, you go on with your normal routine as directed by your watch.”

I could understand the feelings of relief in the mind of the young man when he called my host in the evening to express his thanks again to me for explaining the *maryada* to him.

## Wanted : A Clean-shaven Sikh

Keeping uncut hair is an essential requirement for a Sikh. Then why do Sikhs advertise, "*Wanted: A Clean-shaven Sikh*" in matrimonial columns ?

This is a very common question asked at Sikh youth camps. To present this issue in the proper perspective, a brief account of the discussion which took place among the youth at a camp in B.C., Canada, is reproduced below :

### The Question

A trainee asked a simple question, "Is it OK if a Sikh cuts his hair ?" My quick response was, "*Nahin* (No). Hair is the identity of a Sikh." His immediate second question put me on the spot was, "Then why do people advertise : *Wanted Match for a Clean-shaven Sikh.*" Before I could answer this question, the boy continued, "Anyway what has long hair to do with the faith of a person ? One can be honest, truthful, and religious without keeping long hair."

To my relief, a bearded European<sup>1</sup> with long hanging hair passed by us. Pointing towards him, I asked the youth, "Is he a Sikh ?" The answer was quick and firm "No" from the whole

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1. He was an official working at the Forest Research Department, Maple Ridge, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. The university has built a teaching centre in the forest there and the Vancouver Sikh youth hired that campsite for a week. Because the official lived and worked in the natural forest, he decided to keep his natural hair as such and let them hang behind his head as the native Indians in America do.

group. I continued, "You mean that just keeping long hair does not make a person Sikh. Probably, this is your argument." The boys agreed. Now, the question before us was, "If keeping long hair does not make one a Sikh, then who is a Sikh and why should a Sikh keep long hair?" We had a frank discussion to find an answer.

### Search for the Answer :

(i) *The faith*: The Sikh faith was founded when Guru Nanak, after coming out of the river, told the people, "*Na koi Hindu, na koi Musalman.*" He implied that God does not judge us as Hindus, Muslims or of any other denomination. Before Him, we all are simple human beings and equal. The people, Hindu or Muslim, high caste or low caste, male or female, who accepted his teaching and lived accordingly, were called Nanak's *sikhs* (note the letter 's' is not capitalized). The word '*sikh*' is a common noun and it means a disciple, a follower. Nanak, having revealed a new philosophy, became popular as a guru.

The perception regarding the word '*Sikh*', a member of the new community which exists today, had not developed then. A *sikh* (follower of the guru), continued to be considered a member of his original community. Bhai Mardana and Rai Bular were Muslims; Baba Budha was a Hindu, and Bhai Lalo was a low caste, but they were all disciples, *sikhs*, of the guru. The folk saying: "*Nanak Shah Fakir, Hindu ka Guru, Musalman ka Pir.*" became popular wherever he went. Both communities joined the congregation to listen to guru Nanak. Later the title '*Guru*' was used specifically for Guru Nanak and his successors. A Hindu raja of Kangra became a *sikh*, a disciple of Guru Amar Das, and supplied timber to build the town of Goindwal. Mian Mir, a Muslim holy man, was a *sikh* of Guru Arjan Dev. Painda Khan, a general of Guru Hargobind, was a Muslim.

As Guru Nanak kept uncut hair<sup>2</sup>, his disciples, the *sikhs*

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2. In the Rajasthan archives, a reference to the visit of Guru Nanak Dev states, "Guru Nanak associated with all people without any discrimination but did not approve those who used razors (shaved their beards or cut their hair)."

whether Hindus or Muslims, also started keeping long hair and wearing turbans as their identity. It may be mentioned here that some Hindus, particularly holy persons, already kept their hair long and sported turbans, even before Guru Nanak was born. Muslims had beards and wore turbans in their own style. *Guru Nanak did not introduce the custom of keeping long hair and wearing turbans; this was a part of the culture all over the world before the time of Guru Nanak.* Europeans also wore turbans, and this is mentioned in the Bible (Ezekiel 44: 18-19) as a religious requirement while praying (episode 6, *Why Do You Wear a Turban ?*).

(ii) *The Sikhs, a new community*: In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh founded a new order called the Khalsa Panth, which came to be known as the Sikh Panth or more often, simply the Sikhs (with capital 'S'). To be a Sikh, a member of the Panth, all *sikhs* had to take *amrit*, wear the 5K uniform, adopt a new surname (Singh for male, Kaur for female), and agree to follow a prescribed code of conduct, the Khalsa *Reht*. In every faith, members are required to follow a specified code of conduct. The same was the case for the members of the Panth.

Not all *sikhs*, believers in the *gurmat* philosophy, became Sikhs, members of the Panth. According to the intelligence reporter of the Mughal court who was deputed to cover the 1699 *Vaisakhi* function, about 20,000 *sikhs* (the numbers differ with different historians) joined the Khalsa Panth and became Sikhs, the members of the new community. Thus, there were three distinct communities, the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs. The first five *amritdhari* Sikhs were known as the *Panj Pyaras*, and the *Guruship* was passed on to them. They were to be guided by the eternal Guru, Guru Granth Sahib.

Deciding not to join the Khalsa Panth did not mean the *sikhs*, the disciples, were no longer followers of the Sikh faith, an impression that some Sikhs mistakenly express about them today. They were welcome to take further time before formally joining the Panth. They were mentioned as *sehajdharis*; now, they are better known as *shardhaloos*, believers of the Sikh faith. Being disciples of the Guru and followers of *gurmat*, they were well-



wishers and supporters of the Guru Khalsa Panth. They always sided with the Panth and suffered with them.

## The Answer

The above historical review gives us the answer to the question, "Who is a Sikh ?" A person who believes in *gurmat*, takes *amrit*, wears the 5K uniform, and follows the *Reht*, becomes a Sikh. Otherwise, a believer in *gurmat* is a *shardhaloo*, a *sikh*, (but not a Sikh), a person *on his way* to taking *amrit*, for becoming a Sikh and thus being a full and identifiable member of the Sikh Panth.

'Sehjdhari Sikh' is a contradiction in terms. *Having become a Sikh, one is no more a sehjdhari* (slow adopting). In the other case, '*sehjdhari sikh*' the word '*sikh*' is *redundant because sehjdhari means a 'sikh' moving on the path to be a Sikh (Singh)*; further, there is no need for adding the word Sikh because there is no *sehjdhari* Muslim or *sehjdhari* Hindu.

*Sehjdharis* are members, well-wishers and supporters of the Sikh faith, and they have to be respected as such. They deserve it, and it is obligatory for Sikhs to treat them as members of their community.

Let us understand this through an example. During the British Raj, the Indian Congress party, the only political organization working for the freedom of the country, ordered its members to wear *khadi* (homespun cloth), and reject the British manufactured cloth as part of their non-cooperation movement. Almost all Indians supported the Congress, but many of them did not want to express it publicly. However, they gave full moral, social, and economic support to the party and its goal. They were accepted as believers of the principles of the Congress philosophy. Because these sympathizers were not visible members (did not wear *khadi*) and did not formally join the Congress, they could not be given any office of the party. However, the Congress party listened to their advice, and accepted and respected them as their supporters.

*Sehjdharis* have an analogous status in the Panth. Even though they are not formal and visible (*keshadhari*) members of

the Panth, they are a part of the Sikh community and they play a very important and vital role in Panthic affairs. They have faith in *gurmat*, close associations with the community, and even marital relations with the Sikhs. They provide moral, social, and financial support for the Panth. In short, they are the well-wishers of the Panth in all respects.

There is another common example to explain the status of the *sehjdharis* in the Panth. Many people from all over the world have moved into the USA and have become *resident-alien*s. They are considered Americans for all purposes, but they cannot vote (take part in the political process) because they haven't become citizens by taking the oath of loyalty to the nation. As a resident-alien needs to take an oath to claim membership of the nation, a *sehjdhari* (a resident of the Sikh Panth) needs to take *amrit* (oath) to be a member (citizen) of the Panth before he can participate in the decision making process (voting and becoming a member of the Sikh institutions/gurdwaras).

It should again be mentioned here, as observed in the very beginning, that keeping long hair and wearing a turban alone does not make one a member of the Panth. It is both the faith and the practice of the *Reht* which make one a Sikh. Those who do not believe in Guru Gobind Singh and the *amrit* ceremony founded by him are not members of his Khalsa Panth.

We all know that Radha Swamis, fake Nirankaris, communists, and others who do not believe in *amrit*, even if they keep uncut hair and wear turbans, are not Sikhs. They are not even *sehjdharis* because they do not believe in *gurmat* preached by Guru Nanak. They believe in another faith and they practice what the Guru rejected. One cannot be a member of two faiths at the same time, for example, a Hindu and a Muslim, a Sikh and a Hindu, or a Sikh and a Radha Swami.

Another aspect of the *gurmat* needs to be stated before completing this discussion.

According to the Sikh faith, as already stated, it does not matter in the court of the Lord whether one is a Sikh, a *sehjdhari*, a Muslim, a Hindu, or someone else. People are judged only by

the deeds they do. Being an *amritdhari* is the honor of being a member of the Panth, but it is not a passport to Heaven (anyway, Sikhs do not believe in places like Heaven or Hell). Being a *sehjdhari* or being born in any other faith is not a disqualification for realizing Truth. Baba Farid, Bhagat Nam Dev, and many other holy devotees whose hymns are included in Guru Granth Sahib, are examples before us.

### Another question

At the close of the discussion, a new question cropped up. Were the *Bhagats*, whose hymns are included in Guru Granth Sahib, Sikhs or not ? They did not take *amrit*, a requirement for the Sikhs.

To find the answer, one must understand, as mentioned in the beginning, that the words 'guru' and 'sikh' were in use much earlier than the time of Guru Nanak Dev. They meant a teacher (guide) and a disciple, respectively. (The word 'guru' is accepted now in the English language and is included in the dictionary with the above meaning). The famous scholar, Bhai Gurdas, mentions Kabir and Sen as sikhs. (Var 10 -16.)

ਸੁਣਿ ਪਰਤਾਪ ਕਬੀਰ ਦਾ ਦੂਜਾ ਸਿਖ ਹੋਆ ਸੈਣ ਨਾਈ॥

Motivated by the honorable status obtained by Kabir, another person, Sen, a barber, also became his 'sikh', a disciple.

Kabir was the first disciple, a 'sikh' of 'guru' Rama Nand (note that Rama Nand was a 'guru', not Guru). There were (and are today) many 'gurus' and innumerable 'sikhs', disciples of their respective 'gurus'. However, the word Guru and Sikh have a specific meaning in the Sikh faith. 'Guru' means one of the ten Gurus, besides Guru Granth Sahib and Guru Khalsa Panth; 'Sikh' means a member of the Sikh Panth, not just any disciple. Kabir, Nam Dev, Sen, and others were not Sikhs, members of the Khalsa Panth, which was founded by Guru Gobind Singh much later in 1699.

### The Controversial Issue

One of the trainees at the camp, feeling fully satisfied with

the above dialogue, brought another controversial issue which he found causing lots of problems in the Sikh community. He wanted to know the position of the *sehjdharis* (without turban) regarding gurdwara management. The analysis led us to the following :

As only a citizen (not a resident-alien of a country can vote, and as only a person who has joined the party can be its office bearer, so only a Sikh (a citizen of the Sikh faith), not a *sehjdhari* (a resident of the Sikh faith) is entitled to be an office bearer of the Sikh institutions and gurdwaras. *Sehjdharis*, of course, should be consulted, their views duly respected, and they should be associated in the management of the Sikh institutions. They should not be considered as foreigners, but *members* of the Sikh community as explained earlier. Sikh *Reht Maryada* requires every devotee to be a practising Sikh to perform as a *granthi*, *ragi*, or *parcharak* of the Sikh faith. Every *sehjdhari* should be welcome to become an office bearer but only after joining the Sikh Panth by taking *amrit*.

*If a sehjdhari lays his claim to be a Sikh and thus feels entitled to become a preacher (granthi, ragi, dhadi, kathakar) or the president of a gurdwara, then questions such as, "Why should a Sikh keep long hair?" and "What does a clean-shaven Sikh mean?" will continue to arise and will ever remain unanswered.*

Further, when Sikhs hear in the prayer, "ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਸਿੰਘਾਂ ਸਿੰਘਣੀਆਂ ਨੇ ਧਰਮ ਹੇਤ ਸੀਸ ਦਿਤੇ, ਬੰਦ ਬੰਦ ਕਟਵਾਏ, ਧਰਮ ਨਹੀਂ ਹਾਰਿਆ, ਸਿਖੀ ਕੇਸਾਂ ਸੁਆਸਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਨਿਬਾਰੀ"—Those who sacrificed their heads, got themselves cut joint by joint ...*but lived their faith along with their uncut hair,*" they would wonder, why did the Sikhs suffer so much and sacrifice their lives for living with uncut hair ? The answer, which nobody can change, is that letting someone cut one's hair means giving up the membership of the Panth (even if he continues to read *gurbani* and support the Panth as a *shardhaloo*). Therefore, he loses his privileges of being an office bearer of a gurdwara management or any Sikh institution. We should not ignore the fact that this has been practised (keeping uncut hair, symbolic of their belief in Sikh faith) even during very harsh days for the Sikh Panth when it meant an invitation to death. Why should it be disregarded now ?

## No Guru Celebrated the Birthday of Guru Nanak Dev

*Akal Purakh Ki Fauj*, an organization of the Sikh youth for the study of the Khalsa heritage, invited me to Malaysia. In a house in Kuala Lumpur, we discussed *sakhis* related to the life of Guru Nanak Dev. Observations of the teacher-in-charge of the youth group suddenly drew my attention, when she said, "No Guru celebrated the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev." Before I could question her statement, she explained, "If the birthday was celebrated during the time of the Gurus, there would not have been the mention of the second date, *Kartak*, when the date of *Vaisakh* was already recorded in the earlier-written three *Janam Sakhis*." The analysis of her statement, in the light of the Sikh chronicles, left no doubt in my mind that Gurus or the Khalsa did not hold any function to celebrate the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev.

Have we ever thought of the 'side effects' of these celebrations started quite late in the Sikh history? Since my visit to Malaysia more than a decade ago, the issue has been bothering my mind. When I look back, I find the birthday celebrations to be partly responsible for the split of our community, and thus, a cause of the undoing of the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev. Dear Sikhs, please read the logic and facts given below and reflect upon them.

Whenever I observe only the Ravidasi Sikhs conducting a procession under the banner of 'Birthday of *Guru* Ravidas' (note: the title now used by them is *Guru* and not *Bhagat* as mentioned in *Guru Granth Sahib*), I am reminded of the statement of the Malaysian lady. My eyes are hurt to see the picture (assumed by

the painter) of the Bhagat with hair hanging down, and my mind regrets to see only a small gathering of the Sikhs in the procession. The thought which pricks me is, "Does the Bhagat belong to Ravidasi Sikhs only?" Standing on one side and watching the procession slowly moving on, I cannot help churning this question in my mind and coming to the conclusion, "Maybe, the celebrations of the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev laid the foundation of this split." We know that the birthday celebrations of the Bhagats have been started only recently.

## The Question

A student at a camp in USA asked me a written question, "*Why do most temples celebrate only Guru Nanak's and Guru Gobind Singh's birthdays and not those of the rest of the Gurus? Are not they all equal?*"

The feelings behind such questions led to the celebrations of the birthdays of other Gurus also. How then could Bhagats, whose hymns are also included in Guru Granth Sahib, be ignored? Now, we have celebrations for the birthdays of Bhagat Kabir, Baba Farid, Bhagat Nam Dev and Bhagat Ravidas conducted, in many cases, only by those who belong to the caste of the Bhagat.

The results of the birthday celebrations are before us. For example: (i) We find Ravidasi Sikhs segregated from the mainstream of the Sikh body. The majority of them, at present, no longer think of themselves as members of the Panth. In many villages, and in some areas in the cities also, they have their own gurdwaras called Gurdwara Ravidasian. Some of these gurdwaras now display the sign 'Mandir Guru Ravidas' (their other gurdwaras will surely follow suit and will also be declared *mandirs*). To complete the split, at many such *mandirs*, the painting/statue of Bhagat Ravidas has replaced Guru Granth Sahib.

(ii) Ramgarhias<sup>1</sup> celebrate the *Vishwakarma* day

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1. Ramgarhia is not a caste, but all craftsmen, carpenters, blacksmiths, and masonry workers have adopted this appellation after Sardar Jassa Singh (he belonged to the carpenter class before becoming a Sikh) was given this title. He was made the Jathedar of the fort Ramgarh, Amritsar, hence called Ramgarhia. The *misl*, a unit of the Khalsa, headed by him became known as the Ramgarhia *misl*.

(*Vishawkarma* is the mythological engineer of gods who built their houses and manufactured their arms, etc.) with greater enthusiasm and deeper devotion than that they exhibit during *gurpurb* days. For their congregation, they have also built their own places, called Gurdwara Ramgarhian, where the management is exclusively in the hands of the Ramgarhians. Tomorrow, their faith in *Vishawkarma* may motivate them to install his statue (in some cases, pictures have already been mounted in their gurdwaras). That way, they may also break away from the Panth and become followers of the mythical god instead of Guru Nanak, who united the people to worship one universal God.

The Panth must recognize these facts. Because of these birthday celebrations, caste distinctions are getting more and more significant everyday, resulting in ever-widening divisions of the Panth. Is this not undoing the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev, who aimed to unite all people as one big brotherhood of equals ?

These long-term negative results of starting birthday celebrations of the Gurus made me think seriously about it. I discussed this topic with some Sikh scholars. They could not agree upon what should be done about it. However, on the basis of my discussions with the scholars, I gave the following information to the youth, in response to their question mentioned above, regarding the celebration of birthday *gurpurb*s of only the first and the tenth Nanak.

## The Answer

(i) Many of us have a *wrong perception* that whenever we Sikhs have a special gathering (*jor mela*) we do so to commemorate the birth, demise or any other event in the life of a Guru. *Actually these gatherings were held to preach Gurmat and not to celebrate any day or date in the life of a Guru.* That is why these gatherings were named *jor melas*, For example, *Diwali jor mela*, *Vaisakhi jor mela*, *Maghi jor mela*, *Fatehgarh (Sirhind) jor mela*, *Kartak* (now birthday of Guru Nanak) *jor mela*, etc. (*jor mela* means a major get together of the Sikhs for an annual function).

Some convenient and easy to remember days, whether related to the life of a Guru or not, were chosen for gatherings of the Sikhs. Only less than half a dozen days were chosen for the national functions. Sikhs from all over Panjab participated in them. Other functions were held locally on days important for that place/locality and attended mostly by the Sikhs of the area around. The national functions were conducted regionwise on a large scale. All these functions were used to preach *gurmata* (not celebrate the birth or regret the demise of a Guru), to educate the Sikhs regarding their heritage, and to plan for the future of the community.

Let us look at the major days celebrated by the Sikhs during my school days (thirties and forties):

*Vaisakhi and Diwali* : During the 18th century, Sikhs got together (and they continue to do so even today) twice a year on *Vaisakhi* and *Diwali* at Amritsar. These two days are not connected with Amritsar.<sup>2</sup> People celebrated these days even before the birth of Guru Nanak Dev. They were chosen by the Sikhs because they were well known and very popular throughout Panjab and not because they are connected with the birth or demise of any Guru.

Anandpur Sahib is the place where the Khalsa was founded on *Vaisakhi* Day but the *Vaisakhi jor mela* was not held at Anandpur. It was and is still held at Amritsar (now, in addition to Amritsar, the main function is held at Damdama Sahib, Sabo Ki Talwandi, Bathinda). However, the Panthic gathering at Anandpur is held, not on *Vaisakhi*, but on *Hola Mahalla*.

*Hola Mahalla* : *Hola*, a spring festival, is celebrated at Anandpur Sahib a few weeks before *Vaisakhi*. Again, this day is not connected with any incident in the life of the tenth Guru or any other Guru. Celebration of this spring festival is an old custom

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2. The statement, 'Diwali celebrations were started when Guru Hargobind Sahib reached Amritsar on that day,' is a later addition to our history. During the times of Guru Arjun Dev, the Harimandar Sahib would not have been left dark when lamps were lighted all over the city, and indeed in the whole country. It is a cultural festival observed in North India since times immemorial.



and it, too, started even long before the birth of Guru Nanak Dev. Being a well-known and widely celebrated day, Guru Gobind Singh fixed it as an annual sports and war-games day for the Sikhs at Anandpur. Since then Sikhs continue to gather there for this function every year.

*Kartak Pooranmasi* : The *jor mela* at Nankana Sahib was held on the full-moon day of the *Kartak* month (fall), although Guru Nanak Dev was born there in *Vaisakh* (early summer). Sikhs used to gather there to know *gurmat*, the Sikh way of life, and Sikh history. This being the birthplace of the Guru, the gathering there was wrongly thought to be held on the birthdate of the Guru.

From this we may conclude that all major Sikh gatherings, *jor melas*, were held on days already popular with the people and not necessarily on the birthday or another day connected with the life of a Guru.

This trend of choosing an already popular day for community celebrations is also followed in the west. Christ is believed to have been born sometime in August or September, but Christians celebrate it on December 25. Even before the birth of Christ, this day (25 December) was already a public festival day for celebrating the beginning of the new solar year. On this day, when the new solar year was considered to have started, the day length starts increasing. Now, people often assume, of course mistakenly, that December 25 (Christmas) is the birthday of Christ.

Until recently, a seasonal or an annual major function of the Sikhs was called a *jor mela*; Sikhs, however, now advertise it as celebration of the birthday or *shaheedi* (martyrdom) day of the Guru. This is a wrong approach to the Sikh gatherings. Sikhs held their congregation for community education and not to commemorate the birth or demise day of any Guru, even though the gathering may be held on such a day. Do the Sikhs distribute *ladoos* to celebrate the birthday of the Guru or do they sit together to mourn on the *shaheedi* days? Of course, not. (*No wonder, in future the Sikhs may start doing that, if we continue to go on drifting away from the philosophy of gurbani*). Days were chosen

to hold Panthic congregations for preaching *gurmat* and remembering heritage (history) for maintaining *charhdi kala* in the community, and not for celebrating only a specific incident in the life of the Gurus. Gurdwara functions are held, therefore, in the same way (*keertan*, *katha*, lecture, *dhadhi var*, etc.) whatever the day, birthday, demise day, or some other day.

Naming the functions as birthday celebrations of the Gurus is of recent origin, becoming prevalent only during the British regime. There is no evidence in Sikh history that the birthdays of the predecessor Gurus were celebrated by the successor Gurus or by the Khalsa. No writer has mentioned the celebration of the birthday of Guru Nanak or the martyrdom day of Guru Teg Bahadur by Guru Gobind Singh, or even his own birthday by him.

In the light of the above historical facts, the *correct answer* to the above question, asked by the youth, seems to be that local gatherings and national gatherings are held on popular and convenient days. These days were chosen for *Gurmat Parchar* and discussing the issues related to the Panth. *The jor melas were not advertised as the birth or martyrdom days of the Gurus even when such days, being important in the Sikh psyche, were chosen for the big functions.* This is a very important issue before the Panth for consideration and for giving direction to the Sikhs.

Therefore, it is suggested to the Panth for their serious consideration that the gatherings, we hold for preaching *Gurmat*, may not be named (advertised) as birthday or martyrdom day celebrations, even when they are held on such dates.

Anyway, we cannot celebrate equally big functions on the birth/demise days of all the Gurus, the Bhagats, Sikh *shaheeds*, Khalsa generals and other important figures. To avoid the image that we give more importance to the birthday of one Guru than the birthday of another Guru, we may name the function as *jor mela* on the date/place as was the old practice.

NOTE : *Sankrant*, *Pooranmasi*, *Amavas* and other such days were chosen for local regular gatherings of Sikhs and not to celebrate the significance of these days. Unfortunately, now people believe them to be sacred days, an anti-Sikh belief. They

were chosen just for convenience because these dates/days were easy to remember. Now, instead of *Sankrant* or *Amavas*, the Sikhs have chosen Sunday for such gatherings. *Sunday is a sacred day for the Christians but not for the Sikhs, for us it is merely a convenient day. Sunday or any other day, becomes sacred for Sikhs only if, on that day, they learn lessons in spirituality which help them make their minds peaceful.*

ਨਾਨਕ ਸੋਈ ਦਿਨਸੁ ਸੁਹਾਵੜਾ ਜਿਤੁ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਆਵੈ ਚਿਤਿ ॥  
ਜਿਤੁ ਦਿਨਿ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਛਿਟੁ ਭਲੇਰੀ ਰੁਤਿ ॥੧॥

*That day is pleasant when one remembers His virtues;  
cursed is the day when one ignores Him.*

## Is God Greedy ?

At a Detroit, Michigan, USA camp I was asked a very unusual question. “You place a moneybox (*golak*) before God (Guru Granth Sahib) and every Sikh puts money into it to please God. Is God greedy ?”

The question to me appeared very simple and straight. Therefore, without applying my mind, I replied, “No, God is not greedy. The money is used for paying gurdwara expenses such as electric bills and...” The girl interrupted me, “No. For management of the gurdwara, my dad and other uncles give money (\$100 or even more) to the cashier and get a receipt from him. Even after paying so much money, my dad gives me a dollar bill to give it to God (to put in the *golak*). He himself also puts another extra bill in the moneybox. Why not give all the money to the cashier for meeting the gurdwara expenses ? Why put the moneybox before God ? Is He greedy ?”

It looks easy to answer this question, but I knew that those answers might not have convinced the youth. Further, the answer must involve some *gurmat* philosophy for this ritual.

To think of such an answer, I needed some time. Therefore, I put this question to the youth to give their answers. Some youth did give their reasons for this ritual, probably as told to them by their parents. However, the majority view of the group was not to put any money in the *golak*. Meanwhile, I thought of a response that was unconventional, but it appealed to the youth and they felt satisfied by the answer.

The dialogue, in brief, which took place with the youth was :

Author : Dear friends, imagine you being trained for a post-graduate research degree by an affectionate good professor. The professor also finds a suitable job for you. You get your first paycheck and take a box of sweets to offer to him. Should the professor accept the gift ?

Youth (in one voice) : The professor should accept the offering; it is an expression of thanks by the student to the professor for his help.

Author : If I were the professor, I would not accept it. The boy is under debt, he took a loan for his studies. On the other hand, I get a fat salary and do not need a gift of sweets. Therefore, it looks unethical to me to get anything from that student who has yet to pay back his loan. Why should I be a greedy guy and lower my status to accept sweets from him ?

Youth : The student offers sweets to you not because you are a greedy person or because you need this gift but to express his respect and thanks for your help. It will be wrong for you to say no to him.

Author : Well, now I agree with you, thanks for your advice. In addition, you have found yourself the correct answer to your question. God is not greedy; He does not need any money from us to please Him. We make our offerings (contribute our share for the welfare of the people) in the name of God to express our thanks to Him for His blessings. He gifted us this human life (the highest kind of life on this earth) and other innumerable gifts for our comfortable living. We must be ever grateful to Him (much more than a student should be to his professor); everything we have in this world has been gifted to us by Him.

Even before I explained this to the class, some of the youth had already anticipated where the discussion was leading. It was very pleasant for all of us to conclude that God is not greedy, we have to be grateful to Him and we must always express our thanks to Him. One way to express our thanks is to respect Guru Granth Sahib, the *gurbani* which explains His virtues and His blessings for us. By bowing to Guru Granth Sahib and offering money in the name of God for the welfare of all, we convey our gratitude to Him. (See also episode number 32, Vol I, *Dad ! I wanted to ask You*).

## No Benefit of Keeping Hair Uncut

Sometime in 1984-85, I visited Chicago to pay a courtesy visit to a relative of mine. I availed of this opportunity to attend the gurdwara there and talk to the youth. The teacher-in-charge of the youth classes kindly agreed to invite the students on Saturday in the evening. There were about 20 youth, but only a quarter of them were wearing turbans. One boy, wearing a turban, in a very sweet and soothing voice recited Rehras; this set the stage for my talk.

While introducing me, the teacher told the students, “Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh is the Dean, College of Agriculture, Punjab Agricultural University Ludhiana, and is visiting USA on the invitation of the Sikh Council of North America. He studied in USA during 1961-63 for his Ph.D., while retaining the Sikh insignia, the beard and turban.”

I had planned to discuss with the youth, “Why and how important it is for the youth to live the traditional Sikh way of life, retaining uncut hair and wearing turban.” I had made just an introductory remark to my talk when a student interrupted me, “Sir, what is the benefit of keeping hair uncut?” All the boys looked towards me for the answer to their pet question which the youth put to every speaker. This question had also been asked of me in almost every previous group I had addressed. Usually, the question was put in very rude words. Sometimes, it was a reaction to the directive that without beard and turban, one cannot be a Sikh. They had asked me questions like, (i) ਕੀ ਦਾੜੀ ਨੂੰ ਅੰਬ ਲਗਦੇ ਨੇ ? Does the beard bear mangoes ? The phrase means of what use

is the beard to a Sikh ? Why should we keep it ? (ii) If the length of one 'K' (*kirpan*) can be reduced from its normal three-foot size to less than six inches for the comfort of wearing it, why can we not reduce the length of the second 'K' (*kesh*) to a few inches, which is more convenient and comfortable ?

I was already prepared to help them get over their aversive feelings towards Sikh *Reht*. In a challenging tone I responded, "Who told you that keeping a beard provides any benefit ? I can tell you the benefit of obtaining a medical degree, an engineering degree, doing business etc. How can a beard give any benefit to anyone ? Look at my beard ! I never got a single penny by shaking it, nor have I ever found any dollar hanging from it. Dear friends, don't start keeping beard with the hope of getting any benefit from it."

Hearing this, the youth were pleased and they smiled. These words softened their minds and switched their anti-Sikh and fighting attitude to the learning mode. Because I agreed with them, they accepted me as their friend, and not as an outside preacher, who always felt proud in criticizing their lifestyle. Earlier, the youth were sitting as far away from me as possible, parked by the walls and leaning against them. By this time, they all had moved very close to me and formed a semicircle around me. From this change, I knew that I had won the first round of talks, the confidence of the youth.

Their next question was with a desire to know the Sikh philosophy, and it was asked in polite words.

Youth : Then why are we told to keep beards (uncut hair) ?

Author : That's a very serious question. It needs thorough discussion and it will take a lot of time. Let me first get some information about you. Pointing towards a tall student, I asked, "Are you a member of any sports team ?"

Before the boy could say anything, many students replied, "Yes, he is our basketball player."

Capitalizing on my ability to identify the boy, I continued, "So, I was right. I could see from his face that he is my friend.

I was also a member of the basketball team of my college, the famous Punjab Agricultural College, Lyallpur, now in Pakistan.” Conveying my pleasure and feeling of camaraderie with the boy, I told him, “During the next game, I will come wearing my 1945 jersey and join your team. We will.....”

While the boy again remained silent, a couple of other boys interrupted me and tried to argue, “No, you cannot join our team. Your uniform is different from that of our team.”

I retorted, “But my uniform is superior to that of his team; mine is a college uniform and his is a school uniform. Rather, they should welcome me.”

I continued asking such silly questions to keep the ball in their court and force them to be defensive and get tired of overruling my questions; many of them were obviously meaningless. I mimicked how the youth ask us silly questions about keeping beard and turban, and thus force us to get angry and feel defeated.

Finally, my strategy was successful when one boy questioned me, “You are the dean of your college, and you don’t know even this simple fact that every team, has its *own uniform* different from that of all others ?” Thus, I won the second round too.

My positive response surprised all of them; I told the youth in a loud voice, “Thank you, sir.” Saying so, I immediately got up, grasped the boy’s hand and made him to stand, and embraced him with great affection. The students looked at us and anxiously waited for more words from me. While my arms were still around him, I stated in a serene voice, “You are my teacher; today I have learnt a lesson of my life from you. Before I left for my studies in USA, my mother advised me not to cut my hair, irrespective of the problems I might encounter. Her orders to me were : *‘If they want you to cut your hair, return home with beard and turban. We do not need your Ph.D., if you have to barter your Sikh sroop (turban and beard) for it.’*”

Standing face to face with the student, I continued, “Yes, my mother told me not to cut my hair because our ancestors got their neck cut but not their hair. Dear youth, she did not tell me the



reason behind this but today you have given me the answer. If a Sikh removes his turban and cuts his hair, and thus gives up his identity, he can no more claim membership of the *unique team*, the Khalsa Panth. The Guru founded this 'Team' to live upright and play the *game of life* to protect the human rights of the weak and helpless irrespective of their caste or creed."

This made the youth feel proud of their Sikh birth and they listened to me with rapt attention. After taking my seat again, I continued my discourse on Sikh heritage to tell them the games of life played by the Khalsa and the laurels won by them :

You know that whenever the invaders attacked India, they carried with them not only their loot of the Indian wealth, but also the young women and men, the honor of India, as prisoners. In Afghanistan, they were sold as slaves just for a coin. The Khalsa attacked the caravan of the invader, Abdali, and got as many prisoners free as possible, of course, at the cost of their own heads. Later, they escorted the freed prisoners safely to their parents (Hindu or Muslim) in Delhi. In 1761, Abdali had to fight a bitter battle against Marhattas in Panipat before he could reach Delhi. He lost his many men and in retaliation, he ransacked Delhi. While he was returning to his country through Panjab, Sikhs recovered most of the booty looted by him and rescued more than 2000 prisoners (mostly women) who were taken back safely to their parents in Delhi. After this great loss, Abdali was very much frustrated and mad with the Sikhs.

To take revenge on the Khalsa and eliminate them from the face of the earth, in 1762 Abdali brought a specially trained cavalry from Kabul, Afghanistan. The Khalsa were in a very vulnerable position with women, children, and old people. They were caught unaware while moving from Ludhiana towards safe places in the desert regions. Almost half the Sikh nation lost their lives (about 20,000 Sikhs were martyred<sup>1</sup>) for the 'crime' of saving the honor of the helpless women of the tyrannical Delhi rulers. The Sikh nation, thus, paid the heaviest price for protecting

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1. This is known as *wada ghalughara*, the Sikh holocaust of 1762, in Sikh history.

the honor of the country; however, the Khalsa continued serving the weak, irrespective of their faith or caste. Not only the families of the released women but all people in Panjab nurtured sympathy, respect, and love for the Sikhs, and voluntarily many embraced the Sikh faith. Therefore, not only Hindus, but also ruling Muslims (Zalam Khan of Sirhind became Zalam Singh) were proud to join the Khalsa even though big awards were offered for the heads of the Khalsa. The result of the high character of the Khalsa was that they became the rulers of the Panjab. They stopped invasions from Kabul forever.

The class time was about to be over, so I ended my talk with the following conclusion :

Before leaving this room, I must express my gratitude to you all for the injunction, which my heart received from you, "After removing one's beard and turban, a person no more can claim to be a member of the Khalsa Panth. He loses the honor of this *unique heritage* earned through unparalleled sacrifices. My mother, being a daughter of an Akali of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a descendant of the brave Khalsa, knew this heritage. The Sikh massacre of 1762 occurred not very far from her village. That is why she told me not to cut my hair. However, she did not explain to me the reason. Today, I have learnt that."

It was a win-win situation for all. The teacher-in-charge, who found it disturbing in the beginning when I told the youth that the beard did not provide any benefit, was also happy.

The next day, after the Sunday gurdwara was over, about half a dozen parents requested me, "We want you to stay here. We will get a green card (residential status in USA) for you. Our children want you to talk to them in their weekly classes." After knowing the wish of the parents, I felt very much satisfied that the youth had understood the lesson to enjoy the honor of keeping beard and turban, the insignia of the Khalsa. (The next day, *amrit* ceremony was conducted as demanded by some Sikhs who took *amrit* to feel the pride of the membership of the unique Khalsa team for protecting the human rights of the weak. One person got

stuck in the traffic jam and could not reach the gurdwara in time. To receive *amrit*, he flew to Columbus, Ohio, where ceremony was conducted a week after).

ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਨਿਧਾਨੁ ਹੈ ਮਿਲਿ ਪੀਵਹੁ ਭਾਈ ॥

ਜਿਸੁ ਸਿਮਰਤ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਈਐ ਸਭ ਤਿਖਾ ਬੁਝਾਈ ॥

*Let us join together to drink Naam, that is, love virtues of God. By remembering Him, one gets peace and all his worries are over.*

## Why Do We Miss the Message of *Gurbani* ?

I learnt an important lesson in this regard from my young son. When he was of about four years old, he fell down from the roof while attempting to fly a kite and became unconscious. We could do nothing but pray for his life. After about 10 days, he was discharged from the CMC Hospital, Ludhiana without suffering any permanent damage to his brain. We thanked God for His grace and we decided not to let him fly a kite again.

After some years, we shifted to a new house with a fairly big yard where the children could play and run about. One morning, I was scared to find him with a kite. With anger in my words, I asked his mom, "Why did you purchase him a kite again ? Have you forgotten your prayers offered during his hospital days ?" The usual answer moms give was, "He was insisting for many days; I purchased it with the condition that he will fly the kite only in the yard."

That day we were to attend a family function in our neighbour's house where children would not be permitted. To reinforce the message, I wrote on a paper in Punjabi, "I will not go on the roof to fly my kite, I may fall down and break my leg." In a commanding tone, I told him to write it 10 times before he touches his kite. When we returned after about an hour or so, he was on the roof flying his kite. It is not possible for me to put in words what went through my mind.

I enticed him to come down by saying, "Sonny ! Come down and look what we have brought for you." Controlling my anger,

I asked, “Did not I ask you to write ten times?” Without the feeling of any guilt for not caring for my directions, he said, “Daddy ! You may count it, I wrote 11 times.” At the same time, he picked up the paper and put it in my hands. He completed the writing assignment without getting the message contained in it.

Overcome by his innocence, I could not say anything to him. I took a chair under the shade of a tree in the yard. I analyzed the whole episode and this is what I realized.

“We recite *nitnem* daily but we usually miss the message meant to direct our daily activities. However, we feel satisfied for having performed our religious responsibility as a Sikh. The result is that after many years of *gurbani* reading, the weaknesses and shortcomings in our minds continue to keep us away from the peace we are supposed to enjoy in our lives. This benefit is possible only with the grace of God, hence a Sikh is directed to recite *gurbani* keeping his mind tuned to the message and also pray for His grace.”

ਦਸ ਦਿਸ ਖੋਜਤ ਮੈ ਫਿਰਿਓ ਜਤ ਦੇਖਉ ਤਤ ਸੋਇ ॥  
ਮਨੁ ਬਸਿ ਆਵੈ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਜੇ ਪੂਰਨ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਹੋਇ ॥੧੦॥

*I searched in all directions to look for God, and found Him everywhere. However, one can keep his mind tuned to His virtues only if he is blessed by Him.*

## Why no *Palki* in Darbar Sahib ?

In Vancouver, B.C., Canada, during my informal visit to his house a youngman, showing his surprise, asked me, “*Baba Ji !* Why is there no *palki* for the *parkash* of Guru Granth Sahib in Darbar Sahib (Amritsar) ?” He probably had visited Amritsar for the first time. His words came out of a hurt mind in a tone of a complaint against the SGPC management for their failure to provide *palki* and thus not showing due regard and respect for Guru Granth Sahib. My straight answer would have further injured his disturbed mind, therefore, I decided to tell him first about the old culture of the use of *palki*.”

I explained, “Dear friend, you must have read the political history of the Guru period when kings used high quality horses, elephants or *palkis* for their ride. *Palki* was used to provide the king the comfort and the honor while moving from one place to the other.

“In the Sikh tradition, we read about the use of the *palki* for the first time when Guru Arjun Dev is mentioned to have brought the sacred four *pothis* containing *gurbani* (They were later known as Baba Mohan Pothis) from Goindwal to Amritsar.” To impress me, the youth endorsed my statement, “Yes, I know, Baba Mohan refused to give those *sanchis* to Bhai Gurdas. Later, the Guru had to go himself.”

I continued, “The king, as a judge does today, held his court while sitting on an open throne fully visible to his audience and not when sitting in a *palki*. Accordingly, while conducting a *diwan*, we always install Guru Granth Sahib on a *manji* (a throne,

and not in a *palki*) with a canopy on the top and accompanied by a *Chaur*. *Gurbani* is a spiritual eternal Guru, the true king, hence we always adopt full protocol due to a king, whenever a *diwan*, court of the Guru, is held. The *palki*, as during the days of Gurus, is used every day only to carry Guru Granth Sahib from the Akal Takht to Sri Darbar Sahib for the *keertan diwan* there. In the same way, *palki* is also used to bring Guru Granth Sahib back to the Akal Takht at night.”

Having explained to the youth to his satisfaction that *palki* is to be used for carrying it and not for the *parkash* of Guru Granth Sahib, I felt relaxed and happy. However, I found myself in an in-extricable situation when the boy asked his second question, “Then why do all the gurdwaras in Vancouver do *parkash* of Guru Granth Sahib in a *palki* ?”

It was a very sensitive issue and I did not want to give my opinion about it. The boy continued to repeat his question, therefore, after a little while, I had to admit that it is because of the ignorance of the managements of the gurdwaras that they submit to the misplaced enthusiasm of some members to install a *palki*. They wrongly believe that a more impressive and a more costly *palki* means more respect for the Guru.

It will not be out of place to mention an incident related to the use of *palki* in a SAS Nagar (Chandigarh) gurdwara. A *kathakar*, very popular in the *sangat* and considered to be very conversant with *gurmat* philosophy, talked about the tradition of doing *parkash* on *manji sahib* and not in a *palki*. The management did not relish it. The next day the *kathakar* was dismissed from his job. As the *sangat* agreed with the *kathakar*, they all also moved out along with him. The matter was settled only when he was re-appointed for doing *katha* but the *palki* continues to be there.

Interestingly, another gurdwara in the same locality does not have a *palki* because the founding members of the gurdwara committee knew about the tradition of doing *parkash* on *manji sahib*. However, after about two decades, the new management could not restrict some volunteer *sewadars*, who clean the *diwan*

hall, from placing a large number of swords, spears, *chakars* etc in front of Guru Granth Sahib. They are arranged every week in different decorative positions in the place between *golak* and *manji sahib*. The mind cannot avoid the impression of these decorations for concentrating on Guru Granth Sahib while bowing before it. In some cases, all the space is covered by flower-pots of different kinds so that the devotees appear to be bowing to flowers and not to Guru Granth Sahib.

Once in a gurdwara in Vancouver Island, B.C., Canada, a devotee brought two huge flower plants and placed them in front of the *manji sahib*. They were big enough to obstruct the view of the *Granthi Ji* attending Guru Granth Sahib. After the *diwan*, the management removed those plants behind the stage. The devotee started crying when he visited the gurdwara next morning. It took a couple of days for some senior members to console him and convince him that people visit gurdwara for paying their respect to Guru Granth Sahib and reflect on the message of *gurbani*. They do not come to be entertained by flower arrangements and decorations. The view of Guru Granth Sahib cannot be reduced to a secondary position by the attractive and excessive decorations.

When I reflect on the tendency of increasing decorations in front of the *manji Sahib*, I am reminded of my visit to an ancient Kangra temple. My host chose the time to go there when the inner doors were to be opened. We were the first group to view the *devi*. As soon as the doors were opened and the devotees had their first look of the *devi*, they immediately started commenting on the beauty of her crown and the qualities of the *sari* wrapped around the *devi*, its color, print design and the golden borders, beauty of her ear-rings, etc. No one seemed concerned to talk about the religious message for which the statue was installed there.

Decorations in gurdwara around the *palki* and *manji sahib* have become so prominent that the mind of the visitors is caught by them. Also, one finds it difficult to listen to *keertan* attentively and reflect on *gurbani* teaching. In a couple of cases, I was



constrained to request the management to switch off the twinkling and multicolored lights around and in front of the *palki*. I explained to them that *sangat* comes to the gurdwara to listen to *gurbani/katha* and not to be pleased with decorations and changing lights, the place for which is a living room in a house. The twinkling electrical lights disturb the concentration of mind, something not desired by any devotee, who attends gurdwara to learn the message of *gurbani*. Such discrimination have no place in *diwan* hall of a gurdwara.

## No Crown, No King—No Turban, No Singh

This brief 4-word rhyme gives a very strong message about the importance and significance of wearing turban by the Sikhs. The readers would have already read it in some article or in a hand-out. I do not know who first wrote it; however, I am reminded of a couple of episodes whenever I read it. Two of them are mentioned below :

1. During 1984-85, I was assigned the duty of explaining the message of *Asa Ki Var* to the *sangat* in the Guru Nanak Mission Gurdwara, Springfield, Maryland, (Washington D.C.). A young couple that was living not far from the gurdwara invited me to spend one week with them. In modern terminology, I will define them as *pucca* Sikhs.

One evening, the husband returned home happy and smiling. Without being asked about it, he voluntarily started narrating his story :

“I must tell you something very good, which I observed today. I was waiting for my turn in the clinic of our family physician. A European lady entered the clinic. Without observing normal courtesy or any formality, she went straight to the doctor talking to a patient, and asked him, “Are you Dr. Singh ?” The physician and the patients were all surprised. However, the doctor, instead of telling her to sit and wait, said, ‘Yes.’”

With an abnormal expression on her face, she started pouring words out of her mouth in a fast flowing stream, “I was in Delhi. I know Singhs, they are good people. I read Singh on your name-plate and came in to see you, but you are without a turban. How

come you have written the word Singh on your name-plate ? I tell you to either wear your turban or remove the word Singh from your name." As soon as she finished, she turned and walked out of the door.

She left as quickly as she had dropped in. No one spoke; all of us mutely observed this episode which took place in a flash.

With pleasure visible on his face, my host continued, "Professor Sahib ! She was a brave lady who bluntly told the doctor to wear a turban. I always thought like that but did not know how to say it to him. Whenever I visited him, I always wished he wore his turban to bring a good name to the Sikh community."

2. When I was teaching at the Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, the wife of a friend of mine narrated a very embarrassing episode during a courtesy visit to our house. When she and her family reached the local railway station to depart on vacation, her husband went straight to the ticket window to purchase their tickets while she watched their luggage.

As the passengers in the queue seemed common people, her husband, being a University professor, felt he could jump the queue. So he walked straight to the ticket window. A *sardar jee* standing in the queue yelled from behind, "*Babu jee* ! Come back and join the queue. We also want to purchase our tickets." His wife did not relish the words *babu jee* for her professor husband with a Ph.D. from a foreign university. She tried to correct him saying, "ਓਹ ਭੀ ਸਰਦਾਰ ਜੀ ਹੈ, ਬਾਬੂ ਜੀ ਨਹੀਂ—He too is a *sardar jee*, and not *babu jee*."

To her embarrassment, however, quick came the reply, "ਬੀਬੀ ਜੀ, ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਤਾਂ ਇਸ ਨੇ ਨਾਲ ਰਖਿਆ ਹੈ, ਪਰ ਸਰਦਾਰੀ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਤੇ ਗੁਆ ਆਇਆ ਹੈ—He is keeping you with him but where did he lose his *sardarhood*, (*sardari*, turban, his identity) ?" She had no reply. Meanwhile with a little pause, the passenger continued, "ਪੱਗ ਬੰਨ੍ਹੇਗਾ, ਤਾਂ ਹੀ ਕੋਈ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਸਰਦਾਰ ਮੰਨ ਸਕੇਗਾ !—He will be believed to be a *sardar jee* only if he wears a turban."

Finally she told us, "You know he is a Sikh from inside, and is proud of his *Sikhi*, I wish he wears a turban so that people identify him as *sardar jee* and not as *babu jee*."

## Crown, not Cap

It is an old episode but it is very fresh in my mind because of the emotional dialogue, I had with a press reporter. By the grace of God, I completed my studies in Ph.D. (Agronomy) at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio in August 1963. More than 7,000 graduates filled the auditorium to capacity, all wearing black gowns and black caps and standing to receive their degrees. My white turban in that black background was conspicuous and caught the eye of a press reporter. Through the rows, he came straight to me and asked, "Why are you not wearing your academic cap ? Are you not proud to have earned it ? I know you must have worked hard for this honour."

Instead of telling him that keeping uncut hair and wearing turban is a requirement of my Sikh faith, I gave a different answer. His words 'hard work' had touched my heart. I responded smilingly, "The crown, you see on my head, was earned after 200 years and sacrifices had to be made to retain it; this degree took only 2 years to earn. Why should I exchange this invaluable crown for any cap ?"

This helped us begin an informal talk during which I explained the founding of the faith in 1499 by Nanak (Do not divide humanity into different faiths, all humans are brothers and sisters being the children of the same Father-Mother (God); work for welfare of the whole humanity) and the graduation ceremony of the trainees (disciples, Sikhs) held in 1699 when this crown was bestowed on us and we were knighted as saint-policemen (Legions of the Lord for peace, the Guru Khalsa Panth).

Lo ! Next morning, when I had just boarded a plane to return to India, the flight attendant comes to me and tells, “A lady has an urgent message for you. Would you, please, come to the window ?” The lady of a local catholic family, who invited me to spend my weekends with them and their friends, handed me the newspaper with my front-page picture, wearing a turban and looking towards the cap in my hands; the heading: “The Sikh, wearing a crown earned in 200 years, looks at a cap earned in 2 years.” In the very short time, allowed to her to talk to me, she said with her face glowing with pleasure, “I showed this picture to the airport manager, he was happy to see it, and allowed me in. This is our gift to you, a life long memory of our love for you. Carry it to your family.” Tears rolling in our eyes, we saw between us the window being shut.

My wife, of course, felt honoured by seeing that picture. She got some camera-photos prepared from this newspaper picture. She replaced the family photo with this photo between the two glass-panes on one side of our study-table lamp as a constant reminder to our visitors, “Turban is a crown granted to a Sikh to make him *Sardar Ji*, we should feel obliged to the Guru every morning when we wear it.”

ਲੋਕਨ ਕੀਆ ਵਡਿਆਈਆ ਬੈਸੰਤਰਿ ਪਾਗਉ ॥  
ਜਿਉ ਮਿਲੈ ਪਿਆਰਾ ਆਪਨਾ ਤੇ ਬੋਲ ਕਰਾਗਉ ॥੧॥

*In deference to the love of God, I am willing to throw compliments by the people into fire (I do not care for such worldly honors). Instead, I sing those words (His praises) by which I can realize Him (His virtues).*

## If Your Son Strays

Every Sikh is hurt when Sikh children stray from their faith. However, I feel more hurt when people hold the parents responsible for the action of their children. Rather, when they judge the parents 'guilty' of negligence in raising their children and their failure in impressing upon them the importance of Sikh *Reht*. Many times, the parents themselves start analyzing, "Where did we go wrong?"

Many *gursikh* parents motivate and help their children to learn Punjabi, recite *Nitnem*, and even sing *sabads*. They are sent to Sikh youth camps to get them immersed in the practice of Sikh faith and the *maryada*. But during their higher secondary school or when they go to college/university, the children may shock their parents by throwing away their turbans and neglecting *Nitnem*. To add to the worries of their parents, they may even start drinking and taking drugs. Parents of such children feel embarrassed and some even feel depressed. They do not show the same self-esteem, which reflected earlier from their faces and words, when their children wore turbans and did *keertan* in the gurdwara.

My dealings with the youth, particularly in the west, have revealed that this is not a correct reaction by the parents. The path of life adopted by the children depends upon what God has built in their minds and it blooms at a particular stage in the company of their friends. They choose their friends according to the makeup of their minds; God alone, and no one else, decides that. If the children are respectful and obedient, it may not be because of the guidance given by the parents; if the children do not listen to their

parents, it may again not be the fault of the parents. We, as Sikhs, must know that it is God's will. Therefore, feeling guilty if the children go astray is not right on their part. Yes, they lose the honour of being the parents of *gursikh* children. Accepting it as His *bhana* (will), they should reconcile with it and live their normal life.

To begin with, children listen to their elders and do what the latter want them to do. In some cases, however, disobedience and disregard for the advice of the parents may start very early. All is in His hands; of course, we should pray and do whatever we can as our duty towards our children. We must not forget that it is His Will that prevails. Here are two classic examples :

Two brothers attended my camp every year. They were very obedient kids and they showed great interest in learning their lessons. However, I was surprised, when after about three years, the elder brother told me confidentially, "You have to counsel him (the younger brother), he took beer at a party. When I told him alcohol is prohibited for a Sikh and our father will be mad, he retorted, 'I do not care for him. Few more months, I will come of age, then I will drink during dinner in his presence.' However, his elder brother, even when pressured by his peers to have just one sip for the sake of company, refused firmly and left the party as a protest."

In the second case, a lady councillor in a Sikh youth camp eloped with her boyfriend and phoned her parents on the third day from a nearby tourist city, "Do not worry about me. I have married my friend; you know I am an adult. I did not need your permission." Confusion and worry prevailed in the minds of the organisers of the camp for two days. Her brother, a committed Sikh, felt embarrassed and to save face from his friends, did not attend the remaining days of the camp.

This episode regarding the opposite behaviors of two children of the same parents should convince the reader that we should not hold good parents responsible if their children get derailed. Also, parents need not feel guilty if, in spite of their efforts, their children go astray.

The reader may know such cases where the two brothers part their ways generally during or after high school level. I may also share with the reader that I discussed this subject with Sant Teja Singh. He explained that nature of our mind is given to us by God, we should not find fault with the parents or anyone else. We should pray and do whatever we can to help our children to keep them on the track. If the children still go astray, accept it as the will of God. This can happen to anyone, we have such examples even in the house of some Gurus.



## Your Son is Watching You

Most parents believe they are doing their best to help their children grow into respectable members of the society. However, the children have different stories to tell. Many social scientists have written books on this topic but I am giving below my own experience in the hope this information will lead to a better understanding between parents and their children.

1. At a camp in USA, a trainee surprised me with his outburst, "I am here not to learn *sakhis*." He was in the 10-13 years age-group. Every student was supposed to narrate in the class at least one of the *sakhis* learnt by them at the camp. The boy had an above-average I.Q., but he did not volunteer to tell any *sakhi* taught. When the class was over, to help him choose a *sakhi*, I asked, "Which of the Sikh martyrs thrilled you most? Have you chosen any *sakhi*?" He could not care less, and responded in a casual way, "My parents are doctors. They have gone to Florida on a pleasure trip. Taking me with them would have been inconvenient to them and it would have cost them a lot. It was a cheaper alternative to put me in this camp. Here you provide me board and lodging and do babysitting also for me for a nominal fee; I am here for this purpose and not to learn or do anything else at the camp." After unloading the hidden pressure on his mind, he departed leaving me immersed in a sea of reflections.

2. At another camp in Dallas, Texas, when I was addressing the class of senior students, a Sikh opened the door a little, peeped inside, looked at the class and left. When the class was over and

we got out, another trainee from a junior group gave a package to one of my students saying, “Your father told me to hand it over to you.” Another student, who knew what it was, said in a loud voice, “Wow ! Such a costly game ! Congratulations.” The boy, without showing any sign of pleasure on his face, murmured, “He (the father) wants to buy my love with money. He has no time for me.” His tone reflected his hurt feelings, far from any happiness over the gift. This all happened in a moment, too short for me to absorb it meaningfully.

Later, I sat alone to recapitulate the message of this episode. I shared it with some parents. It is clear that unless we spare time regularly for our children, sit with them, express mutual love and have informal chats to develop closer ties with them, we may lose them.

I may add that many children ask me, “Why do our parents want us to feel obliged to them for everything they do for us, board and lodging, clothes, pocket money, etc. ? Is it not their responsibility ?” They do not stop here, they go further and say, “They are welcome to guide us, but why do they pressure us, rather force us, to adopt their way of life against our wishes ? Why do not they help us to follow the path we choose...?” This, unfortunately, is the other side most parents do not know.

ਭਾਣੇ ਵਿਚਿ ਕੋ ਵਿਰਲਾ ਆਇਆ ॥

ਭਾਣਾ ਮੰਨੇ ਸੋ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਏ ਭਾਣੇ ਵਿਚਿ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਇਦਾ ॥੧॥

*Few people follow the will of God. Those who respect His will experience peace, while others suffer worries.*

## Dear Singh, Watch Yourself

Sikhs are no longer confined to Punjab or India only; you may meet a Sikh anytime and anywhere on this earth. There is also a joke to bring out the visibility of the Sikh in all countries and their gurdwaras, where food and lodging are offered free to the visitors. The joke goes like this :

In London, U.K. in 1967 two persons were arguing as to who will be the first to reach the moon, Russia or USA. One favoured Russia because they were ahead of the Americans. The other observed that USA had already taken the lead and they will land their man on the moon before the Russians can do that. The third man listening to their arguments said, "Whosoever reaches the moon first, he will be welcomed by a Sikh to the gurdwara and requested to first eat food – *Aao jee, langar Chhako.*"

Having become known the world over, we Sikhs have now a great responsibility to build a good image about our community. Non-Indians have a very high opinion regarding our character. We have to maintain it, particularly in the face of the wrong propaganda done by some communal forces and the political anti-panthic agencies. We rightly accuse our leaders for not doing anything to expose this propaganda. Rather, sometimes, they inadvertently become a party to it. However, we Sikhs, as individuals, irrespective of the performance of our leaders, must play our role. This may take a long time but will have a lasting effect on the minds of the people. Our attitude and behaviour must reflect the real Sikh philosophy, the greatness of which is being recognized by people of all religions.

There are many episodes given in the two volumes of this book, *Teaching Heritage, Lessons Learnt* in support of the above observations. Here I am giving two examples which caution/encourage a Sikh how to behave/not to behave to maintain the good image expected of a Sikh.

## 1. Be Calm and Cool

Recently, I was invited to a meeting of Sikh devotees in Chandigarh to discuss the message of *Jappi* with them. While introducing me, the coordinator, a businessman of Delhi, narrated the following experience :

A customer, a European lady, came to his shop and wanted to purchase a variety of cosmetics. She was shown all the items available. Further she was told that, as wholesalers, they sold only complete packages, not individual pieces from a package. After attending an urgent phone call, when *Sardar Jee* returned to the sale counter, he found the lady had picked up pieces of her choice from different packages. He lost his cool and shouted, "Did not I tell you that we do not sell individual pieces ? You could select a package and not a piece."

In a low and cool voice, she responded, "Please, do not yell, sit down. Are you not a Sikh ? Sikhs are not supposed to behave like that. We can have a dialogue and discuss it calmly."

The coordinator, being frank with the audience, confessed, "I felt really ashamed, because, while claiming to be a Sikh, I did not behave like one. However, the incident made me a better Sikh; inside my mind I felt honoured because a foreigner believed that Sikh religion symbolised worthy behaviour."

Returning to the introduction, he said, "The lesson is clear: *Gurmat* philosophy is not just for our intellectual discourse. It is meant to be practised in our daily life. Whatever we discuss in class is meant for adoption and to put our lives on the *gaadi raah*, the highway of spirituality."

This is the only way we can maintain our good image, and justify the high ethical and moral conduct people expect from a Sikh.

## 2. The Son of a *Sher* (Lion), a Sikh.

The fearlessness and bravery of the Sikhs has left a stamp on the minds of the Pathans. There were three Sikh students in the 9<sup>th</sup> Class (1945, 2 years before partition of India in 1947) of about 50 tall hefty Pathans at the Government High School in Mardan, NWFP (now in Pakistan). Once, there was a fight among Pathan students. Among the students, a Sikh also was a witness to the fighting. When the matter came to the Principal, no Pathan was willing to tell the truth for fear of reprisal from the stronger party who were the aggressors. When the Principal came to know that there was also a Sikh student, he was called to the office. In the presence of the guilty students, the Principal said to him, "*Sher ka bacha jhooth nahin boleyga, sach sach kahega* – the son of a lion (Sikh) will not tell a lie, he will speak the whole truth."

The Sikh student (now retired from the central government as a civil engineer and living in Mohali) told fearlessly with a firm tone everything truthfully, without any bias and without concealing anyone's fault. After listening to the Sikh, the Principal asked the guilty youth, "Have you anything to say?" The students bent their heads down. The Principal patted the Sikh, "*Shabash* (bravo); *sher ka bacha jao* – the son of a 'lion' (Sikh), you may leave."

Later no one said even a word to the Sikh boy; they found that though he looked physically weak but he was very brave and morally very strong, and deserved their respect.

The readers can imagine the great honour and prestige of the Sikh community if the Sikhs, as directed by their faith, live an honest, truthful and fearless life.

ਮਿਠ ਬੋਲੜਾ ਜੀ ਹਰਿ ਸਜਣੁ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਮੋਰਾ ॥  
ਹਉ ਸੰਮਲਿ ਥਕੀ ਜੀ ਓਹੁ ਕਦੇ ਨ ਬੋਲੈ ਕਉਰਾ ॥

*My Friend and Master, always speaks sweetly;  
I have found He never uses rude or harsh words.*

## Lost Sheep

The reader may have already read the Bible fable related to the lost sheep and the shepherd, the Christ. I heard it for the first time at a Christian camp held during Christmas break in 1961 at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

The very first sermon in the church was about it. The priest narrated that a shepherd took 100 sheep for grazing out in the jungle. In the evening when he brought them back in the yard, he counted them to be 98 only. A good shepherd is concerned about the lost sheep even when he has 98 sheep in his yard; he wants to save the two lost sheep from the wolves and the lions.

Christ, the shepherd has found them today; he will be glad to have them safe in his yard. Non-Christians should avail of this chance to enter the house of the savior, and become safe...

After the breakfast, the participants were divided into groups for discussion of the morning message. Our group was taken over by two young tutors, probably both missionaries under-training. Without any introduction, they asked us, "Any response to the morning sermon by the priest." I was the first to ask, "My uncle of about 50 years age lives in my village Gill in Punjab. He's unmarried and is very much respected because of his holy living. He sincerely follows all the Ten Commandments of the Bible. However, he does not know anything about Christianity or Christ. Will he be saved or not? Will he get entry into heaven?"

Both the guys simultaneously answered; one said 'no' and the other said 'yes'. The arguments went on for and against the entry of my uncle in the heaven. The participants in the group

also got divided. One section joined me and agreed that whatever kind of life Christ wants devotees to live, he is living that life, therefore, he deserves to be saved. The rest of the group did not agree with this answer. They argued, "The person does not know Christ and he has no faith in him; why will he save such a person?" The arguments and comments went on till the lunch break. The tutors concluded the first session by telling, "The senior priest will come and explain the correct answer to that question in the afternoon session."

The controversy continued unsolved during the second session as well. Every answer of the priest and the explanation of that answer was questioned. Rather many new questions arose. For example: "Will those persons born before the birth of Christ go to Hell? Why they should suffer for no fault of theirs?" "Who will save the Indians (Native Americans) who lived in America after the Christ revealed his message to the people but before the discovery of America by Columbus and the arrival of Christian preachers here?" "We can agree that people buried in graves will be saved after the doomsday; but how about those whose bodies were lost at sea and eaten by fish and about those who got burned by fire?"

The camp ended without providing any satisfactory logic, for the answer yes or no.

The university classes started again after the break. About two or three weeks into the trimester, I was asked to talk about my faith to the Americans in a church in the town. Transport was provided to me. I did not find the camp officials in that group. Therefore, I felt comfortable to present the basics of the teachings of *Gurbani*. My lecture centered around the philosophy that God is the father of whole humanity, and a devotee who loves Him by any name is saved by Him; no prophet can claim sole rights on God.

During the question time, a young girl asked me regarding keeping uncut hair and turban, and their relevance with the basics of the faith. I gave the same answers which I was told by my elders (they are being repeated even today but are not accepted even by

the Sikh youth). My answers did not satisfy the audience, I myself was also not satisfied.

When I returned to India, those questions continued to haunt me. For about fifteen years I discussed this issue with Sikh scholars. Finally, whatever information I could gather during this period and I could get from *Gurbani*, I included that in the article, *Kesh – Sikh Di Aan, Shaan, Te Nishan*. It was first published in the *Gurmat Prakash*, SGPC, Amritsar. Later, it was published in other journals and it is being used even today as a reference.

ਬੂਠੁ ਨ ਬੋਲਿ ਪਾਛੇ ਸਚੁ ਕਹੀਐ ॥  
ਹਉਮੈ ਜਾਇ ਸਬਦਿ ਘਰੁ ਲਗੀਐ ॥੧॥ਰਹਾਉ॥

*O Pandit, do not tell lies (to fool people with claims of auspicious dates, good omens, etc.); you should speak truth. When one listens to the teachings of the Guru, one's ego is destroyed and one is blessed by Him with all gifts.*